

RECENT HISTORY  
OF THE  
LABOR MOVEMENT  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES

1918-1939

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Progress Publishers  
Moscow



Translated from the Russian

ИСТОРИЯ РАБОЧЕГО ДВИЖЕНИЯ В США  
В НОВЕЙШЕЕ ВРЕМЯ

ТОМ ПЕРВЫЙ

1918-1939

На английском языке

First printing

© Издательство «Прогресс», 1977, с изменениями

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Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

И 10303-842  
014(01)-77—55-77

CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	7
Chapter I. American Proletariat in Early Post-War Years .....	15
Chapter II. Emergence of the Communist Party .....	44
Chapter III. Strikes and the Policies of Labor Unions .....	69
Chapter IV. The Movement for Independent Political Action (1918-23) .....	79
Chapter V. The 1924 Presidential Election and the La Follette Movement .....	105
Chapter VI. The Working Class During "Prosperity" .....	119
Chapter VII. The A.F.L. Policies on the Negro Question .....	163
Chapter VIII. The Proletariat During the Economic Crisis (1929-33) .....	178
Chapter IX. The Struggle Against the Anti-Labor Legislation .....	209
Chapter X. Roosevelt Administration Labor Policies During the New Deal .....	218
Chapter XI. The Upsurge in the Strike and Labor Union Movement (1933-35) .....	232
Chapter XII. Unity of Action Movement .....	255
Chapter XIII. The Socialist Party in the Early 30s .....	274
Chapter XIV. Growing Working-Class Influence on the Negro Movement .....	292
Chapter XV. The Movement for Industrial Organisation. The A.F.L. Split .....	308
Chapter XVI. The Working Class in the 1936 Presidential Election .....	347
Chapter XVII. Labor Movement in the Late 30s .....	361

<i>Chapter XVIII. Formation of the Congress of Industrial Organisations .....</i>	413
<i>Chapter XIX. Progressive Forces Fighting Against War and Fascism .....</i>	428
<i>Chapter XX. The Class Nature of Roosevelt's Labor Policy .....</i>	456
<i>Chapter XXI. Historiography .....</i>	473
<i>Bibliography .....</i>	515

## PREFACE

These are troublous times for the United States of America, times marked by social conflicts on every front, with workers fighting against the policies of the monopolies, farmers demanding aid from the government, Blacks battling against discrimination, students organizing demonstrations and rallies, with ferment in intellectual circles, and increasing factional struggle in the Republican and Democratic parties. Nor is the economic horizon cloudless. Along with intermittent industrial upswings, the economy experiences recurrent slumps and crises. At the same time, super-giant corporations come into being, and continued concentration of production and capital leads to the creation of huge monopoly associations that have become a component of what is known as the military-industrial complex.

The socio-economic and political developments in the life of the country cause uncertainty about the future among many Americans, and the scientific and technological revolution of the past two decades has only increased their concern: the realities of life around them show that although the United States is a technologically advanced nation, American society nonetheless is torn by social contradictions. The press abounds in statements to the effect that something has gone wrong with America, that difficult times are upon her.

Under these circumstances, history imposes a special task upon the American working class, the most numerous, progressive and organized part of the society and the primary driving force of the democratic, anti-monopoly movement.



The proletariat plays an important role in the economic and political life of the nation. Its task is to rally all working people for the struggle against the vast power of the monopolies, for democracy, social progress and transformation of American society.

The American proletariat has traversed a hard and complicated road of struggle. It took shape under unique socioeconomic and political conditions. As we know, the United States actually never knew feudalism. After the War of Independence, industrial development took place alongside a lengthy process of settling the West, while the slave-owning system dominated the plantation economy in the South. This period was marked by an acute shortage of labor power. Large contingents of workers—some 42 million people from various countries—poured into the republic from Europe, most of them joining the army of hired labor. This vast immigration movement had a definite effect on the formation of the American nation and its working class, its views, customs and psychology.

Another important factor was the geographic position of the United States, which protected it from military invasions by foreign powers. The American economy was spared the ravages of world wars; moreover, it showed an accelerating rate of development, as a result of which the monopolies multiplied their wealth. The standard of living of the working class became higher in America than in other countries, and this affected the very character of the labor movement in the U.S.A. It must be added, however, that the American proletariat is confronted by a strong, experienced and organized bourgeoisie which makes wide use of political concessions and compromises, exerting ideological influence on the proletariat. It implants the ideas of reformism and trade unionism in the labor unions, and seeks to hinder the development of proletarian class consciousness, to detract workingmen from politics, and to preserve and deepen cleavages among them along occupational, nationality and racial lines. The prevalence of the trade unionist ideology in the working class, the predominance of economic struggle, and the fact that only a small proportion of all workers are unionized account for the theory that the development of

American capitalism is “exceptional” and arguments supporting the idea of “class collaboration”, that have appeared in the American historical literature.

Not only historians and economists, but some reformist labor leaders as well, deny the existence of a proletariat as an independent class in the United States; they preach “class peace” and “social harmony”. George Meany, the present A.F.L.-C.I.O. President, maintains that there is no such concept as “proletariat” in America. Speaking at a convention of the National Association of Manufacturers in December 1956, he confessed that he belonged to that group of leaders who had never organized strikes or taken part in them. Ultimately, he stressed, the things he was fighting for did not differ from the objectives of the N.A.M.

The contention that class consciousness is alien to American workers can be found frequently in American historiography. The adherents of the theory of consensus in the history of the U.S.A. assert that the Marxist-Leninist teaching on classes and class struggle is altogether inapplicable to the United States. The authors of the present work, therefore, have undertaken as one of their tasks to trace the operation of the general laws of capitalist development and the irreconcilable contradictions between labor and capital under U.S. conditions. The authors proceeded from the conviction that it is just as wrong to exaggerate the nationally specific features of a country as it would be to ignore them; in so doing, they heeded Lenin's indication of the need “to seek out, investigate, predict, and grasp that which is nationally specific and nationally distinctive, in the *concrete manner* in which each country should tackle a *single* international task”.<sup>1</sup> In this connection, it is important to take into account the historical conditions in the United States under which the working class and its ideology developed, and the national composition and structure of the proletariat. In ascertaining the nature and significance of the working-class struggle against capital, it must not be overlooked that “each country has developed more strongly first one, then another aspect or feature or

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 92.

group of features of capitalism and of the working-class movement".<sup>1</sup>

The struggle of the American proletariat developed unevenly. There were ebbs and flows, slumps and upsurges in its history. All this depended on the economic and political situation in the country and on the general intensification of class contradictions. It was important in this study, for example, to ascertain the relationship between the strike movement and economic crises. It is noteworthy that the strike struggle was most intensive not so much in years of crisis as during periods when the economy was in a relatively active state. During crises, labor's struggle assumed other forms—the unemployed movement, hunger marches, etc.

Considerable attention is devoted in this work to an analysis of the strike movement and descriptions of major strikes, the role of right-wing union leaders, the weak and strong sides of labor's struggle and the basic trends in it. The documentary and factual materials cited refute the assertions made by a number of American historians that classes and social contradictions have disappeared. On the contrary, the working class has to wage a long and strenuous struggle to improve its economic position.

The history of the trade union movement is dealt with in detail. This question occupies a central place in the work. An analysis is made of the anti-labor policies of the right-wing leaders of the American Federation of Labor, and the causes of the split and crisis of the Federation are examined. A detailed study is made of the movement of American workers to establish industrial unions and to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and at the same time of their effort to achieve unity in the trade union movement. The desire of the masses for unity led to the merger of these trade union centers in 1955. This strengthened the positions of American labor and opened up new possibilities for stimulating the class struggle. However, the key positions in the leadership turned out to be in the hands of men who advocated the principles of "class collaboration", and this had adverse consequences for the united A.F.L.-C.I.O. trade union center. The progressive forces demanded that the organization and cohesion of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 308.

workers be enhanced, that unity be strengthened, and that a campaign be launched to bring the broad masses of industrial and office workers into labor unions. The conservative leaders, however, did not support this movement. There was great disillusionment among progressive workers, and it was not long before some unions were either expelled from the A.F.L.-C.I.O. or compelled to leave on their own with an eye to moving once again toward unification in the future, but on a new and democratic basis.

In their analysis of the weaknesses of the trade union movement, the authors show the forms and methods of struggle used by the employers and the government against the labor unions and the working class as a whole, and examine anti-labor legislation and the policies of right-wing union officials who implant the ideology of trade unionism in the working class.

A study of the basic stages of the class struggle of the proletariat is inseparable from the study of the history of its vanguard, the Communist Party, and its struggle for the vital interests of working people, for democracy and social progress. American Marxists had to work in difficult circumstances of constant persecution and repression under numerous anti-communist laws. Nonetheless, they fought courageously, and their efforts were always aimed at expanding the Party's ties with broad sections of working people and winning the confidence of the workers. At certain stages, the Communists succeeded in uniting an appreciable part of the progressive forces, including those in the labor movement, around their slogans and demands. They took an active part in organizing strikes, in the creation of the C.I.O., and in the fight against anti-labor legislation. The Communist Party consistently worked to combat the influence of bourgeois ideology on the working class. During World War II, it devoted much effort to the struggle against fascism, and in the postwar years worked actively for the democratic rights and vital interests of the working people and fought against reactionary elements.

At the same time, the Party strove to strengthen its own ranks and to rid itself of splitting and quitting elements. It went through difficult years of sharp ideological struggle against repeated attacks from both right and "left" opportunism.



Prominent in the general democratic labor movement was the problem of a third party. Progressive forces tried to form such a party after the end of World War I, in the mid-1930s, and in the postwar years. The movement involved both industrial workers, farmers, office employees and intelligentsia. The Communist Party's position on this question varied depending on the political situation in the country. The Party encountered great difficulties in this area. Its attempts to organize a massive Farmer-Labor party in the 1930s failed. The Progressive Party formed after World War II with active communist participation did not remain in existence for long.

In dealing with the struggle of the American proletariat, the authors treated the Negro question as an inseparable part of the movement for social progress and democracy in the U.S.A. The struggle of the American Blacks is intertwined with the struggle of the working people against the dominance of the monopolies. For this reason, considerable space in the present work is devoted to an examination of the nature of the Black movement and the role of the working class and unions in it.

The authors have considered various aspects of the labor movement from the standpoint of the opportunities and prospects for creating an anti-monopoly coalition. The facts show that intensified monopoly oppression, the development of state-monopoly tendencies in the economy and politics, and the scientific and technological revolution and its consequences all contribute to the further aggravation of social contradictions in the United States. They create objective conditions for a new upsurge in the struggle of the masses and for the formation of a united anti-monopoly front led by the working class. But enormous difficulties still lie ahead. Of great significance here are the correlation of classes and parties, the socio-economic and political situation in the country and the exacerbation of contradictions between labor and capital. Subjective factors and the strategy and tactics of the progressive forces also play an important role.

It must be noted in this regard that the American labor movement grew under the influence of not only domestic conditions but also of developments in the international arena.

The untenability of the theory that the development of American capitalism in general and of the U.S. labor movement in particular was "exceptional" becomes apparent in the light of this interaction of nationally specific factors and general regularities.

This explains why the authors contributing to this book could not study the history of the class struggle in the national context alone, in isolation from the international revolutionary movement. The development of the United States has always been influenced by the world economy and by political and military events of international significance. What happened in Europe, Asia and other continents was reflected in the economic and political life of the U.S.A. and left definite traces in American history.

The impact of such historic events as World War I and the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia gave rise to the general crisis of capitalism, which has stamped the entire subsequent economic and political history of the United States.

With this in mind, the authors considered it pertinent to trace the influence of the socialist revolution in Russia and the revolutionary upsurge in Europe on the labor movement in the United States. They felt it important to show how Soviet and American trade unions cooperated during World War II, what international ties the American trade union centers had and what part they played in the creation and activities of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

Considerable attention is given to the fight of American labor and other progressive forces against the growing danger of fascism and war, and to working class participation in World War II and in the postwar movement for peace and democracy.

The above complex, important and little-studied problems have determined the structure, content and direction of the present study. The first volume covers the history of the American labor movement between the two world wars; the second is devoted to an analysis of the struggle of the American working class during World War II and in the postwar period.

The first volume was written by the following authors: Preface—G. N. Sevostyanov; Chapters 1-3—I. M. Krasnov; Chapter 4—Y. F. Yazkov; Chapter 5—I. I. Cherkasov and N. V. Sivachyov, with the section on the Socialist Party by N. V. Kurkov; Chapter 6—V. L. Malkov; Chapter 7—V. L. Malkov, with the section on farm workers by Y. F. Yazkov; Chapter 8—V. L. Malkov, N. V. Kurkov, N. V. Sivachyov; Chapter 9—B. Y. Mikhailov, with the paragraph on the national composition of the working class by A. N. Shlepakov; Chapter 10—B. Y. Mikhailov, with the section on farm workers by N. V. Sivachyov and the section on the movement of the unemployed by V. L. Malkov; Chapter 11—B. Y. Mikhailov; Chapter 12—V. L. Malkov; Chapter 13—V. L. Malkov and S. M. Askoldova. The bibliography was compiled by N. V. Kurkov.

## CHAPTER I

### AMERICAN PROLETARIAT IN EARLY POSTWAR YEARS

World War I left a deep trace in the history of mankind. It had an impact on the economic and political development of the countries involved and accelerated the growth of social contradictions within them. The war contributed to the revolutionization of the popular masses. In Russia, the October Socialist Revolution was accomplished, opening up a new era in the development of society. The people of Soviet Russia embarked on the building of socialism. Bourgeois-democratic revolutions put an end to monarchies in a number of other countries.

How did all these developments affect the United States of America?

As we know, the United States at first refrained from entering into the war, and on August 4, 1914 proclaimed itself neutral. At that point, neutrality suited the interests of big business which reaped high profits. Moreover, it was designed to win time and prepare public opinion for entry into the war. At the same time, the United States was biding its time until its competitors exhausted themselves in the war, thereby allowing it to step in at the most favorable moment.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. American casualties in the war were relatively not large: 116,600 battle and other deaths, and 204,000 wounded.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1955, p. 227.



Total profits over the four years of the war (1915-1918) amounted to \$33,168 million.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the war, 17,000 new millionaires had appeared on the scene, bringing their total number to more than 42,500.<sup>2</sup>

On the eve of the war, the United States was a debtor to European states, primarily to Great Britain. After the war, it became the world creditor. According to figures as of August 15, 1920, it had granted loans totalling \$9,712 million to the allied states (Britain, France, Belgium and others).<sup>3</sup> Economically, the U.S. surpassed many of the largest powers, as a result of which Britain's, and especially Germany's and France's role in world production of iron and steel was considerably reduced, while the U.S. share climbed sharply. In the period 1915-1919, the United States accounted for 6 percent of the world's population and about 55.8 percent of the world's production of iron and steel. Similar changes took place in other sectors of the economy. A program of building the American merchant fleet drastically altered the tonnage relationship among the world's maritime nations. In this area, the United States moved firmly into second place, edging out Germany.

The structure of American exports also changed considerably. Before the war, the United States exported primarily foodstuffs and raw materials. After the war, however, industrial goods became the basic export. U.S. foreign trade (in money terms) was more than three times greater in 1920 than in 1913, and exports prevailed over imports. As an industrial giant, the United States moved into first place among the capitalist powers. This naturally had an effect on its domestic and foreign policies, the correlation of class forces within the country, and the structure of the working class.

By the end of the war, the United States was a land of profound social contrasts. This was not clearly reflected in American statistics, for it classifies the entire able-bodied population as working people, and divides them into groups

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States 1789-1945*, Washington, 1949, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. A. and M. R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, Vol. II, New York, 1942, p. 747.

<sup>3</sup> *The World Almanac and Encyclopedia, 1921*, New York, p. 410.

according to occupation or profession and not according to their relationship to the means of production.

Thus, in 1920, out of a total population of 105.7 million, 42.2 million were listed as economically active: 20.3 million manual workers; 10.5 million white-collar workers (mostly office workers); and 11.4 million farmers, farm workers and farm managers.<sup>1</sup>

With a classification like this it is impossible to determine the real social composition of the society as a whole, or the composition of the working class, the bourgeoisie and the farm population.

Another way of classifying the able-bodied population may be found in the economic literature, one in which account is taken of size of income as well as type of occupation. In this kind of breakdown, the society is divided into the following categories. Here are the figures for 1920<sup>2</sup>:

	Thousands	Percent
All wage-workers .....	23,300	56.0
industrial workers .....	15,370	37.0
other wage-workers .....	7,930	19.0
Clerical .....	3,715	8.9
Farmers .....	8,500	20.5
Bourgeoisie .....	6,085	14.6
lower .....	3,759	9.0
intermediate .....	2,100	5.1
upper .....	226	0.5

The American working class included various sections of working people who were employed not only in production but in the services sphere as well. However, the basic part of the proletariat were industrial factory workers. In 1910, they numbered 17.8 million, and in 1920, 20.3 million, which amounted to a growth of 14 percent.

At the same time, the number of hired laborers in agriculture fell from 2,832,000 to 2,271,000 between 1910 and 1920. There was a total of 27,088,000 industrial and

<sup>1</sup> David L. Kaplan and M. Claire Casey, *Occupational Trends in the United States 1900 to 1950*, Washington, 1958, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Corey, *The Decline of American Capitalism*, New York, 1934, p. 560.

office workers employed in nonagricultural establishments in 1920.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that the change in the working class was not only numerical but qualitative too. It stood higher than the previous generation in occupational skills, cultural level and class consciousness.

Scientific and technological progress in the second decade of the twentieth century required higher general vocational standards, in connection with which the numbers of skilled and semiskilled workers increased, as illustrated by the following figures (in percent)<sup>2</sup>:

	1910	1920
Skilled .....	14.5	16.7
Semiskilled .....	11.2	13.3
Unskilled .....	18.2	17.7

These figures show a growth in the proportion of skilled and semiskilled workers with a simultaneous, albeit insignificant, decrease in the percentage of unskilled workers.

Thus, by the beginning of the 1920s, the skill structure of the American proletariat had changed appreciably under the influence of the country's economic development, technological progress, and improved organization of work. At the same time, its composition in terms of nationalities represented in it was also changing. It was very mixed due to the continuing inflow of immigrants, a fact that had a specific impact on the formation of class consciousness and the character of labor movement as a whole.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, immigration still remained an important source of labor power. It contributed considerably to the total population growth, accounting for 55 percent of the growth between 1900 and 1910, and 26.1 percent between 1910 and 1920.

About 8.8 million people immigrated to the United States (mainly from Austria, Italy and Russia) in the first decade

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, Washington, 1960, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *The Skilled Labor Force*, Technical Bulletin No. T-140, April 1954, Washington, 1954, p. 13.

(1901-1910), and 5.7 million in the second. No other country had ever experienced such an enormous population influx. As a result, American industry was provided with a big labor force. Lenin wrote in this regard that "America heads the list of countries which import workers"<sup>1</sup> and that "America is advancing more and more rapidly, taking the most vigorous and able-bodied sections of the working population of the whole world".<sup>2</sup> The powerful influx of skilled labor force considerably facilitated U.S. technological progress.

After the war, against a background of the world revolutionary upsurge and intensified class struggle in the U.S., new features appeared in American immigration policy which were to determine it for several decades thereafter. The ruling circles adopted a policy of not only reducing the overall import of labor power, but of a careful screening of immigrants. The purpose was obviously to keep out those of them who might have a revolutionizing influence on the American proletariat.

According to the 1920 census, there were 16.8 million foreign-born or children of foreign-born (white) aged 10 or older in the U.S. These included persons who had become naturalized citizens. Moreover, there were 13.5 million persons (whites) living in the country who had no civil rights. Both categories included people of 45 different nationalities, especially from Europe, and accounted for more than 34 percent of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Of the 13.9 million foreign-born persons living in the United States in 1920 there were, among others: 1,870,000 Germans, 1,610,000 Italians, 1,400,000 Russians, 1,140,000 Poles, 1,037,000 Irish, 814,000 English, 626,000 Swedes, and 2,022,000 Austrians.<sup>4</sup>

Almost half of the 7,750,000 foreign-born wage earners at that time were in the manufacturing industries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 454.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. IV. Population, 1920; Occupation, Washington, 1923, p. 340 (figures rounded.—Auth.).

<sup>4</sup> H. P. Fairchild, *Immigration. A World Movement and Its American Significance*, New York, 1926, p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> *Labor Fact Book I*, New York, 1931, p. 81.



By the beginning of World War I, many nationalities were represented in American industry. In some industries—usually the most labor intensive and with hard working conditions—over half of the labor power was of foreign origin. This was true, for example, of the iron and steel industry, bituminous coal mining, clothing manufacturing and oil refining, where the proportion of foreign-born to native workers was 58 percent, 62 percent, 69 percent and 67 percent respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The war, which led to a sharp reduction in immigration, did not substantially alter the proportions of various nationalities in the working class. On the whole it led only to a certain increase in the proportion of foreign-born workers in industry, since it drew into production large numbers of people from the ranks of the unemployed. The unemployment rate had been higher among immigrants than among native Americans.

Where immigrants settled depended mostly on the geographical distribution of industry. In 1920, 83 percent were in the North, 10.8 percent in the West, and 6.2 percent in the South.<sup>2</sup> A similar pattern was characteristic of subsequent years as well. This gravitation of immigrants to the established industrial centers in the North and their reluctance to settle in the South continued for many decades. Lenin wrote of the South as a region of sharecropping and “the most stagnant area, where the masses are subjected to the greatest degradation and oppression”. At the same time, he noted that “immigrants to America, who have such an outstanding role to play in the country’s economy and all its social life, shun the South”.<sup>3</sup>

Besides reasons of a purely economic nature—the lack of industrial development, and the existence of such forms of exploitation as sharecropping—the immigrants avoided the South also because of the predominance there of extreme manifestations of racism and chauvinism.

<sup>1</sup> Clarissa S. Ware, *The American Foreign-Born Workers*, New York, 192, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> See, A. A. Баграмов, *Иммигранты в США*, Moscow, 1957, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 26-27.

Immigrants settled unevenly in the North and West too. They gravitated toward states and cities which had industrial enterprises where immigrant labor was readily used. Among such were New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey and Massachusetts. Moreover, newly arrived immigrants tended to go where people of their own nationality had already settled, to districts of cities and towns that were almost completely populated by their fellow-countrymen.

According to the 1920 census, there were 10.5 million Blacks in the U.S., which amounted to 10 percent of the population. About 90 percent lived in the Southern states, almost 80 percent of them in rural areas. In the North, Blacks worked mainly in industry, while in the South most were agricultural workers or small tenant farmers. 81.1 percent of the Black men and 38.9 percent of the Black women aged 10 or older were employed, while the employment figures for the country as a whole were: men, 78.2 percent, and women, 21.1 percent. Employment figures for the white American-born population were: men, 75.1 percent, and women 17.2 percent.<sup>1</sup> Most Black workers were unskilled or semiskilled and received low wages. As a rule, Blacks made from two-thirds to a half of what whites received for the same work, and Black women were particularly low paid.

Blacks were victims of harsh discrimination in Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi. There, racism took on its most ugly forms. Blacks migrated by the thousands to the industrial North—to Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Cleveland, etc.—and to the Midwest, hoping to find some alleviation there.

Between 1916 and 1920 alone, over half a million Blacks migrated from the South to the North.

The second big migrational flow occurred in 1922 and 1923, when new industries began to develop after the economic crisis. This migration had important consequences for the Black population in general. Their numbers in the North increasing, Blacks began working in almost every key industry.

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. IV, p. 340.

Their labor was very significant in the steel, auto, coal and meat-packing industries and on the railways.

During the war and in the first postwar years American workers in their mass showed an increased desire for organization. The trade union movement was on the upswing, which manifested itself in a growth in union membership: according to Bureau of Labor Statistics figures, it stood at 2,647,000 in 1914, 3,368,000 in 1918, and 4,046,000 and 5,034,000 in 1919-1920.<sup>1</sup> This growth came largely from the inflow in miners, steelworkers, shipbuilders, meat-packers, railroad workers and others, employed above all in war-related industries.

The leading role in the labor movement was played by the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), which by 1918 represented 111 national and international unions, 45 state federations and a total of about 28,000 local unions.<sup>2</sup>

Its executive council included: Samuel Gompers (president), Frank Morrison (secretary), Daniel Tobin (treasurer), and eight vice-presidents, including James Duncan, Joseph Valentine, Frank Duffy and William Green. The A.F.L. leaders pursued a policy of class collaboration.

Built on a narrow craft principle, the A.F.L. united primarily the skilled and highest paid part of American workers, mostly of Anglo-Saxon origin.

The total membership of A.F.L. affiliated unions was 2,021,000 in 1914, 2,726,000 in 1918, 3,260,000 in 1919, and 4,079,000 in 1920.<sup>3</sup> For Blacks and immigrants, the A.F.L. was, in practice, a closed organization; nor were unskilled workers allowed into its affiliated unions. The highly paid upper crust of skilled workers organized within the A.F.L. deliberately fenced itself off from workers in the lower strata.

The A.F.L. leadership headed by Gompers collaborated with government bodies in its openly hostile stand toward Soviet Russia.

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *American Federation of Labor, History Encyclopedia Reference Book*, Washington, 1919, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *A. F. L., Proceedings*, 1922, p. 24.

Among trade union organizations independent of A.F.L. the major ones were the railroad Brotherhoods, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). All in all of the country's approximately 27 million workers employed in industry, transportation and the services field in 1920, from 4 to 5 million, or about 18 percent were union members.<sup>1</sup>



1. Samuel Gompers, President of the A.F.L. from 1886 to 1924

It should be stressed at this point that during this period in U.S. history there were many sincere and incorruptible labor leaders who fought boldly for the interests of the working class. Such famous names as Eugene V. Debs, William Haywood, Charles E. Ruthenberg, John Reed, William Z. Foster, Ella Reeve Bloor, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, John Fitzpatrick, Tom Mooney, Israel Amter, Robert Minor and Eugene Dennis comprise far from a complete list of outstanding labor movement figures. There were, in addition, many progressive, democratically-minded functionaries in the central and local union bodies who made a big contribution to the struggle for the vital interests of the workers.

In the first postwar years, the Chicago Federation of Labor under the presidency of John Fitzpatrick succeeded in winning a considerable degree of independence within the A.F.L. With its 325,000 members, it was a progressive center in the American trade union movement, carrying on an active campaign for the creation of industrial unions at the Chicago slaughterhouses and steel mills. There were also strong

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 73, 97.



sentiments within the C.F.L. in favor of forming a labor party. John Fitzpatrick was a radical leader and kept in close contact with William Foster, which fact had a positive influence on the work of the C.F.L.

Another important labor organization was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, which in 1920 had about 150,000 members, representing virtually all the country's clothing workers. A militant union, built on the industrial principle and made up basically of immigrants, it followed a radical course and conducted a number of successful strikes. Many of its members held socialist views.

But the most militant labor organization was the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), created with the active participation of Eugene Debs, Daniel de Leon and William Haywood. At the founding convention in Chicago on June 27, 1905, it was announced that the total strength of the I.W.W. affiliated unions was 50,287 members.<sup>1</sup> The core of the organization was made up of the Western Federation of Miners, and of lumberjacks and farm workers. The I.W.W. was largely connected with the working-class movement in the West. It revived the idea championed by the Knights of Labor in the 1870s and 1880s of organizing all workers into one big union regardless of race, nationality, sex, skill, etc. It scorned the A.F.L. program for its spirit of collaboration between labor and capital, and adhered instead to a position of class struggle, which promoted the development of the class consciousness of the workers and their solidarity. The I.W.W. led a number of large strikes. During World War I, it was dealt a heavy blow: on September 5, 1917, agents of the Department of Justice raided I.W.W. offices and the homes of members in various parts of the country. In the repression that followed, about 2,000 I.W.W. members were arrested between September 1917 and February 1918, with an especially large number of arrests made in Chicago and Sacramento, California.

<sup>1</sup> Philip Taft, *Organized Labor in American History*, New York, 1964, p. 290.

Among those arrested were I.W.W. secretary-treasurer William Haywood (Big Bill, as many workers called him) and a number of members of the I.W.W. Executive Board, officials of local trade union organizations and newspaper editors. They were charged with belonging to a "subversive" organization that pursued the aim of destroying the system of hired labor and the government of the United States.

During the trial, defendants William Haywood, Ralph Chaplin, George Harrison, Sam Scarlett, George Andreytchine, Grover Perry, Jim Thompson and others proved the falsity of the charges made against them and staunchly stood for their cause. However, the court found them guilty and sentenced them to various prison



2. William Haywood, a leader of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World

terms and large fines. In Sacramento, the court sentenced 26 I.W.W. members to 10 years' imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> William Haywood also received a prison term.<sup>2</sup>

Such trials took place in a number of cities.<sup>3</sup> Persecution of I.W.W. activists occupied a prominent place in the repressive measures of the Department of Justice. All the while, the bourgeois press heaped calumny upon the I.W.W., prejudiced public opinion against it, and encouraged Ku Klux Klan terrorist actions against I.W.W. men. Despite all this, many in

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, New York, 1952, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> In 1919, Haywood was released on parole. In 1921, he fled to Soviet Russia, where he worked until his death in 1928 (for more details see, W. D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book. The Autobiography of W. D. Haywood*, New York, 1929).

<sup>3</sup> John Reed, "About the Second Masses Trial", *The Liberator*, December 1918, pp. 36-38.

the I.W.W. conducted themselves courageously, boldly defending their political views.

When the October Socialist Revolution triumphed in Russia, I.W.W. members, left-wing socialists and other progressive workers greeted it enthusiastically. With the formation in September 1919 of the Communist Party of the United States, part of the I.W.W. membership entered its ranks.

While noting the positive aspects of the I.W.W.'s activities, we should also mention the fact that it was under the influence of anarcho-syndicalist elements who spread erroneous views on questions relating to the trade union movement, the role of a working-class political party, the role of the state, etc. Many I.W.W. leaders indulged in leftist phrases, and this had its negative effect. In the stormy revolutionary events of the postwar period, the I.W.W. did not survive the ordeals of the times. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn wrote: "The Industrial Workers of the World swept like a comet across the skies of the American labor and socialist movements from 1905 to about 1920."<sup>1</sup> After that, it rapidly lost its influence on the working class, grew markedly weaker organizationally and gradually diminished from the political scene, leaving "only the memory of a glorious past."<sup>2</sup>

Analysis of the trade union movement in the United States in this period shows that by the beginning of the 1920s the A.F.L., built on a narrow craft basis, was incapable of taking militant action. Its craft unions frequently fought among themselves and acted as strikebreakers. As concerns trade unions where progressive sentiments prevailed, such as those of the miners and the clothing, steel and textile workers, they accounted for only a minority in the overall mass of organized workers. This was inevitably reflected in the nature of labor's struggle for its vital interests.

The end of the war saw no improvement in the situation for workers. For one thing, demobilization of the wartime army and reconversion in industry were followed by a growth of unemployment which was to become one of the nation's most serious problems.

The employed were not faring well either. According to

<sup>1</sup> *Political Affairs*, September 1964, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

government data, the average annual income of workers in industry at the beginning of 1920 was \$1,367, as compared with \$1,078 in 1918. This amounted to an increase of about 27 percent. However, the cost of living in that period had risen much faster.

The U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that in late 1919-early 1920, a family of five needed \$ 2,262 to assure an average living standard. Thus, the average working-class family budget had a yearly shortage of nearly \$900.<sup>1</sup> Senator Harding (who later became President) admitted in a speech on July 22, 1920, that the cost of living had risen and that this was causing widespread discontent.

The labor press noted that wages lagged behind the cost of living throughout 1920, and that real wages were actually lower in 1920 than in 1913. The cost of living went up 102 percent over those years, while union wages had gone up an average of only 87 percent.<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that organized workers usually received higher wages than unorganized workers—and there were several times as many unorganized in the country as organized.

An important factor in the shrinking of real wages was the absence of any federal system of social security and free medical care. Workers had to put away part of their incomes to provide for their old age and for medical services and medicines in case of illness. However, by far not all of them were able to do this.

Thus, in the early postwar years, the American working class encountered new difficulties. The high cost of living, growing unemployment, intensified exploitation and political repression roused American workers to active struggle to improve their economic condition and secure political rights.

While the real wages of workers went down, the profits of the capitalists went up, both absolutely and relatively. Suffice it to say that the aggregate net profit of American corporations between 1918 and 1922 amounted to \$25.3 billion, with their annual profit growing from \$4.5 billion to \$ 5.4 billion, and

<sup>1</sup> See, Anthony Bimba, *History of the American Working Class*, New York, 1927, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> *American Federationist*, October 1921, p. 839.



this against the background of an economic crisis in 1920-1921.

An important landmark in the history of the U.S. labor movement in the postwar period was the general strike in Seattle, Washington, which took place between February 6 and 11, 1919. Actually, it was ignited by a strike of 35,000 shipbuilding workers who had begun a fight for higher wages, an eight-hour day, and a 44-hour week on January 21.

On January 22, a joint meeting of the Seattle Central Labor Council and the Seattle Metal Trades Council (whose representatives belonged to the A.F.L. and took a left-wing position there) adopted a resolution calling for a general strike in support of the shipbuilders. The resolution was sent to all of the labor unions in the city for consideration. The workers responded unanimously. On January 29, a General Strike Committee was set up, consisting of 300 delegates from 110 A.F.L. locals and from the S.C.L.C. On February 2, the Committee elected an Executive Committee to direct the strike, and set up a number of workers' committees.

The preparations for a general strike immediately drew the attention of the U. S. Congress, the state administration and the press. The labor movement in Seattle had always been distinguished for its high level of organization. By 1919, about 50 percent of the city's labor force were unionized.<sup>1</sup> Although most of the unions were affiliated with the A.F.L. they were distinguished by their radicalism, which caused the leaders of the A.F.L. no little concern. The I.W.W. also played an important role in the Seattle labor movement. As for the S.C.L.C. it advocated building unions on an industrial basis, but without breaking off ties with the A.F.L.

Telegrams began pouring into the U.S. Senate from employers demanding help in preventing a general strike. The federal government hastily dispatched troops under the command of Major General Morrison, authorized to declare martial law in the city. However, a general strike could not be prevented.

The workers prepared for action. The Seattle General Strike began on February 6, with 60,000 people taking part,

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, Seattle, 1964, p. 25.

including unorganized workers as well as members of the A.F.L. and the I.W.W. The conservative leadership of the typographers' and musicians' unions sought to break the strike or at least to disrupt unity in the ranks of participants. But their calls to the rank-and-file members of their organizations to return to work went unheeded. Assurances of solidarity came to the Strike Committee from workers in neighboring cities. Workers in Tacoma and miners in Renton went out on sympathy strikes, while the coal miners in Everett, Taylor and other cities gave the strikers financial assistance.

The strike paralyzed the whole city. Factories were shut down, city transit was at a standstill, newspapers stopped publication (except for the General Strike Committee's publication), schools were closed, and ships were diverted to other ports. For a short time, the General Strike Committee virtually ran the city, dealing with such problems as street lighting, water supply, providing the sick with food, etc. It turned over some of the problems to the trade unions and their committees. Mobile kitchens and dining rooms were organized, and hundreds of workers maintained public order in the city.

The employers were knocked off balance. They had not expected the strike to be so well organized. City officials looked for a pretext to use armed force. Mayor Ole Hanson, frightened by the unprecedented upsurge of the class struggle, referred to the strike as a "revolution".

On February 7, the mayor warned that if the strike did not end the next morning he would use force, and the city would be placed under federal control. He guaranteed the employers that they would be protected by troops who had orders to shoot anyone causing "disorder".<sup>1</sup> Although the workers had no intention of retreating, some members of the General Strike Committee, fearing the possible consequences of the strike, began to restrain them. The Executive Committee submitted for the consideration of the General Strike Committee a resolution to stop the struggle. Most of the members of the General Strike Committee did not resist the proposal for long. And when the A.F.L. threatened all strike leaders with expulsion, some organizations urged their workers to go back

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, Vol. 57, Part 4, February 12 to February 24, 1919, p. 3637.

to work. On February 11, 25,000 workers were compelled to cease the struggle. The strike that had begun so successfully was stopped halfway by capitulators.

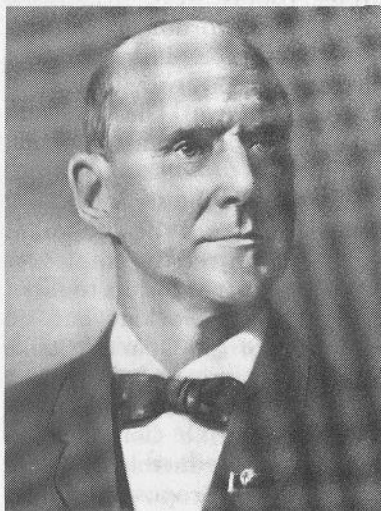
True, 35,000 shipbuilding workers continued to strike for another month, but the struggle was already doomed. Alone they could not oppose the united front of the employers, the local and federal authorities, the bourgeois press and the opportunist trade union bosses.

Although the general strike was suppressed, it was nonetheless an important experience in working-class solidarity and had an influence on developments in other parts of the country.

In February, 28,000 workers in the silk mills in Paterson, New Jersey, went on strike. The conflict was resolved by compromise. That same month saw strikes in New York involving 125,000 construction workers, 50,000 tailors and 15,000 shoe workers. An important event

in the U.S. labor movement was the strike of New York longshoremen (March 1919) in which over 60,000 workers took part. With the help of a conciliation commission, the Department of Labor succeeded in frustrating the strike.

In September 1919, a mass demonstration of over 100,000 working people demanding the release of political prisoners was held in Seattle, timed to coincide with the arrival in the city of President Wilson. Workers with posters calling "Release the political prisoners" filled the streets along which the President was scheduled to pass. They sent delegates to Wilson to express their pro-



3. Eugene Debs, prominent figure in the Socialist movement of the United States

test and demand the release of Eugene Debs, Tom Mooney, Warren Billings and other labor leaders.<sup>1</sup>

The growing class consciousness of the steelworkers in their fight against the Steel Trust was especially evident in the great steel strike of 1919. It involved 365,000 men,<sup>2</sup> and lasted three and a half months—from September 22, 1919 to January 8, 1920. The strike, long in preparation, began simultaneously in dozens of cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and other states.

The causes of the strike were deplorable working conditions, low wages, and arbitrary practices on the part of the Steel Trust. Among other things, the employers refused to recognize the right of workers to organize and to engage in collective bargaining.

The conflict was already in the making prior to World War I. For a time, the edge was taken off, but after the war it burst out with new force. Steel production in 1919 had dropped by more than 10 million tons, or almost 25 percent as compared with 1917.<sup>3</sup> Shrinking demand had in turn brought about a drop in prices. As the economy converted to peacetime production, the monopolists, reluctant to part with their wartime profits, shifted the hardships of reconversion onto the workers. The latter responded with a mass strike action.

It was common knowledge that most of the workers received low wages for hard work. Elbert Gary, president of the U.S. Steel Trust, admitted that of the 191,000 workers employed in his corporation's plants 69,284, or 36 percent, worked 12 hours a day.<sup>4</sup> President of the Carnegie Steel Company

<sup>1</sup> On July 22, 1916, during a Preparedness Day Parade in San Francisco, a bomb explosion killed nine persons and wounded 40 others. Tom Mooney and Warren Billings, members of the local labor movement, were arrested in what was obviously a frame-up and charged with responsibility for the explosion. In December 1916, Warren Billings was condemned to life imprisonment and Tom Mooney was condemned to death on February 24, 1917. Exposure of the frame-up by the progressive press and many protest demonstrations in the United States and other countries saved Mooney's life. His execution was postponed, and in 1918 the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Both men were ultimately (years later) released and pardoned.

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike*, New York, 1969, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1922, Washington, 1923, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919*, New York, 1920, p. 48.



Williams told an investigating committee in November 1919 that of the 55,000 workers employed at the company's enterprises 60 percent worked 12 hours a day. The commission further reported that the weekly wages of most of the steelworkers had been for a number of years below the minimum living standard established by government experts for a family of five.

Immigrants, who made up over half of all workers in the steel industry,<sup>1</sup> were in a particularly difficult position, since they received lower wages than other workers for the same work.

When Father McConnell, chairman of an Interchurch World Movement committee to investigate the causes of the steel strike asked immigrant worker A. Pido why he was striking, Pido answered that he was fighting for an eight-hour day and better conditions. Another witness, a Slovak priest in Braddock, Pennsylvania, testified: "The men are working from 10 to 13 hours a day. The conditions under which they are living are bad for America. The housing conditions are terrible. The work conditions, the hours of work, are absolutely impossible.... There is no hope for them bettering their conditions, for they work from the time the whistle begins to blow in the morning until they are whistled out at 6 o'clock in the evening."<sup>2</sup>

The steel companies did not allow their workers to join labor unions, and fired any steelworker who attempted to do so. This ran counter to the statement of the National War Labor Board that had acknowledged and confirmed the right of workers to organize and to bargain collectively through their elected representatives. The employers, the statement specified, could in no way deny the workers this right, infringe on it or obstruct its implementation.

It was clear to progressive workers that they could win only if they were united and organized. Labor's struggle for organization produced some outstanding leaders. One of them was William Z. Foster. A true son of his class, he early came to know the heavy labor of the worker holding jobs as a seaman, lumberjack, and railroad worker. Harsh reality evoked in him

<sup>1</sup> Clarissa S. Ware, *The American Foreign-Born Workers*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919*, New York, 1920, pp. 83-84.

a passionate desire to comprehend the social roots of the phenomena he witnessed. He became a convinced radical and joined the I.W.W. It was there that he developed his ability as an organizer. Later he withdrew from the I.W.W., joined the A.F.L., carried on extensive work in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Employees, and became one of the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

Foster's organizing talents were revealed further during his activity in creating a union in the meat-packing industry in Chicago, where he became secretary-treasurer. He established ties with local organizations and helped the union functionaries in their work.

A new stage in Foster's activity began with the drive to unionize the workers in the steel industry. The Chicago Federation of Labor joined the organizing campaign and sent a resolution on this question to the A.F.L. executive council. The A.F.L. leadership did not hasten to reply. In the meantime, Foster was meeting with labor activists, advocating the necessity of unionizing the steelworkers, and outlining the main tasks of the struggle.

An active part in the labor movement was taken by Ella Reeve Bloor (whom the workers respectfully called Mother Bloor), Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and others. Ella Bloor was active in organizing a number of strikes in the coal, steel and meat-packing industries. She took part in setting up labor unions and in the struggles for the economic and political rights of workers and the release of political prisoners. Associated initially with the left wing of the socialist movement, she later became a participant in the communist movement, faithfully and indefatigably serving the cause of the working class. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a prominent figure in the struggle of American workers, traversed a road from member of the Socialist Party and the I.W.W. to Chairman of the Communist Party.

At the A.F.L. Convention in St. Paul in June 1918, William Foster, on behalf of the Chicago Federation of Labor, introduced a resolution calling for a massive campaign to organize steelworkers. This time, Foster's appeal was heard, and the convention supported it.

A conference of representatives of international A.F.L.

unions connected with the steel industry was held in Chicago on August 1 and 2. Twenty-four unions with a total membership of about 2 million, or about half the membership of the A.F.L., were represented.<sup>1</sup> The unions came to an agreement that a temporary federation should be formed to fight the oppressive practices of the Steel Trust. A National Committee for organizing iron and steel workers was formed. It included one representative from each union. For a short time, A.F.L. President Gompers was the committee chairman; but not wishing to associate himself with the democratic movement of unorganized workers, he soon relinquished the post. John Fitzpatrick, the leader of the Chicago Federation of Labor, replaced him as chairman, and William Foster became secretary-treasurer.

The changes in the National Committee leadership reflected the conflicting views on how the labor movement should develop. Gompers and his supporters went no further than to advocate unification of trade union organizations into a temporary federation. Fitzpatrick, Foster and other labor leaders, however, wanted to step up the political activity of A.F.L. members, and to turn the trade union movement onto the road of democratic development.

Nor could the differences be reconciled later. Although Gompers spoke in favor of developing the trade union movement in the trustified industries—meat-packing and steel—in practice he sabotaged in many ways the effort of the National Committee to organize the workers. For example, he was dead set against admitting unskilled and semiskilled workers into the A.F.L.

The National Committee began its work in Chicago and Pittsburgh, areas in which the most progressive workers and strong labor organizations were concentrated.

The Steel Trust realized how dangerous the situation was and, tried by means of partial concessions to restrain the workers from further action. For example, they introduced time-and-a-half pay for overtime work. But the trust would go no further and "was prepared to fight to the last ditch".<sup>2</sup> At

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

the same time, city officials in the Pittsburgh area prohibited workers from holding meetings.

In the meantime, the organizing drive spread to 50 industrial centers. Between August 1, 1918, and January 31, 1920, over 250,000 workers, or about 60 percent of all those working in the steel industry, were organized into trade unions.

In the spring of 1919, a mass strike movement began. The National Committee worked to prevent spontaneous outbursts and to make the movement an organized action. But the situation in the steel industry grew increasingly tense. Strikes broke out one after another and there were instances of armed clashes. Gompers' resignation as National Committee chairman under those circumstances meant that he had no desire to support the workers in their struggle for labor unions and against the tyranny of the Steel Trust.

The new National Committee leaders tried to enter into negotiations with the steel companies, but their efforts were in vain. Then, on July 20, 1919, at the call of the National Committee, a conference of representatives of the 24 unions was held in Pittsburgh, where it was decided to take a strike vote among the workers. About 98 percent of the workers voted in favor of striking.

A list of 12 demands was drawn up and included such items as collective bargaining rights, reinstatement of all men discharged for union activities, an eight-hour workday, increases in wages, double rates of pay for all overtime after eight hours and for Sunday and holiday work, and the abolition of company unions.

The Steel Trust refused to negotiate. For its part, the National Committee continued to search for peaceful means of settling the conflict. It appealed to President Wilson to mediate negotiations with the Steel Trust. As time passed no response came from Wilson, and the employers continued intimidating the workers and firing activists.

On September 9, the National Committee called a meeting in Washington of delegates from the 24 international unions. That day, the Committee was informed that President Wilson would try to persuade the Steel Trust of the need to hold a



conference of employers and labor unions to discuss the workers' demands.

A meeting of labor representatives again urged President Wilson to compel the Steel Trust to start negotiating. It became clear from the reply given by the President's secretary, however, that the head of the government had no wish to support the workers' demands. The unions were left with no other alternative than to go ahead with the strike.

President Wilson requested that the A.F.L. leadership hold off the strike until after a National Industrial Conference which was scheduled for October 6. Gompers, eager to demonstrate his sense of loyalty, made an effort to bring the National Committee over to his side. Some union representatives supported Wilson's and Gompers' proposal to postpone the strike, but the National Committee held to its decision.

September 22 was set as the strike deadline. The steelworkers received this news with enthusiasm and began actively to prepare for the struggle.

The Steel Trust, meantime, went ahead with strikebreaking measures. In the press and in Congress, the nature of the forthcoming strike was distorted and pictured as "approaching revolution" and a "threat to the Republic". In Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania State Constabulary was concentrated at commanding points.

The situation was tense as 304,000 workers quit their work places at the mills and furnaces. By September 30, there were 365,000 men on strike—almost 90 percent of all the workers in the industry,<sup>1</sup> concentrated in 70 steel centers. The strike paralyzed the nation's entire steel industry. Moreover, it engendered sympathy strikes in the coal mines, on the railroads, in communications and other branches. One such strike was declared in Taylorville, Illinois, on September 22.

On the second day of the strike, the U.S. Senate set up an investigating committee. Senator Thomas spouted thunder and lightning when he urged the committee to make the strikers realize that they were not in Russia but in the state of Illinois.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Record*, September 13 to October 4, 1919, p. 5853.

The question of ways to abolish strikes was almost constantly on the agenda in Congress in those years. The main blow was aimed at active labor leaders. "Mr. Speaker, can it be possible that in this critical time of our Nation's history such men as William Z. Foster are spokesmen for the working classes of the country?" asked Representative Cooper on September 23, 1919.<sup>1</sup> He demanded that the A.F.L. remove Foster from the office of secretary-treasurer of the National Committee to organize the steelworkers, and called for the prosecution of those who "advocate revolution in the United States".

The appeals of men like Thomas and Cooper did not remain unheeded. A hail of repression came thundering down on the strikers. There was a reign of terror in Pennsylvania, the domain of the Steel Trust. Elsewhere, too, the situation was tense. On October 4, 1919, in Gary, Indiana, strikers clashed with police and militia who tried to take strikebreakers under their protection. Fifty strikers were wounded. Federal troops, under the command of Major General Leonard Wood, also took part in the suppression. On October 6, 1919, martial law was proclaimed. A few days later, thousands of workers in Gary staged a parade in which the veterans among them were dressed in uniform. They demanded the release of those arrested and the withdrawal of the troops sent in by the Governor of Indiana.

Other clashes took place in Chicago, Indiana Harbor and other steel centers. In all, twenty-two workers lost their lives during the strike.<sup>2</sup>

The government and the employers succeeded in breaking the strike. On January 8, 1920, the National Committee called a special meeting of its unions in Pittsburgh. There the decision was taken to call off the strike.

The steelworkers waged a stubborn struggle for almost four months but lacked sufficient strength to overcome the resistance of the government-backed monopolies. But, although the workers failed to gain satisfaction of their main demands, they still forced the Steel Trust to raise the wages of unskilled workers by 10 percent after January 1920, and to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5791.

<sup>2</sup> Sec. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece*, New York, 1955, p. 282.

abolish the 12-hour workday and seven-day workweek after March 1921.

The steel strike of 1919 was an important event and a major challenge by the U.S. labor movement, even though it ended in defeat.

Among the main reasons for its failure were lack of unity in the ranks of the workers, inadequate organization, and betrayal of the workers' cause by the A.F.L. upper clique. Other major unions failed to help their striking brothers at the critical moment. Moreover, the 24 international unions connected with the steel industry lacked the necessary unity themselves. The egoism of some conservative labor leaders and their indifference to the needs of the workers were bound to affect the outcome of the strike.

In the period that followed, the great struggle against the Steel Trust influenced the development of the movement for industrial unions as its shortcomings, errors and setbacks were studied. But it required years and the emergence of different conditions in industry before another generation of workers could pave the way for a new upsurge in the movement.

Another major event in that period was a strike by coal miners. On November 1, 1919, despite a ban by the Department of Justice and the labor union leadership, over 400,000 coal miners went on strike, demanding a six-hour workday, a five-day workweek and a 60 percent wage increase. The strike involved over two-thirds of all the coal miners in the bituminous mines and paralyzed the entire central coal basin in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The coal miners had prepared for the strike for many months. As early as January 1919, a decision was taken at a conference of miners' unions to stage a four-day strike in June in defense of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings. The strike took place despite strong opposition from the A.F.L. leadership. The mineowners regarded it as a violation of a wartime agreement and fined the miners. This generated a fresh wave of strikes.

In the summer of 1919, the miners' strike movement spread throughout the country. Characteristically, their struggle went beyond demands for higher wages. On August 3, 1919, at a meeting in Belleville, Illinois, 2,000 workers adopted a

resolution proposing that the forthcoming United Mine Workers convention put out a call to workers in all industries to elect delegates to an industrial congress.

In 1919, the coal miners made several appeals to the mineowners and the government to re-examine their wage agreement. But each time their demand was rejected on the pretext that the armistice with Germany did not mean the end of the state of war and that therefore the wartime agreement between the miners, the mineowners and the government was still in force. However, the U.M.W. convention, held in September 1919 in Cleveland, Ohio, went ahead with demands for a 60 percent wage increase, a six-hour workday and a five-day workweek, time-and-a-half pay for overtime work and double time for Sundays and holidays. The owners turned down these demands as "excessive", and the miners called a strike on November 1, 1919.

The steelworkers, then in the midst of their own strike, welcomed the news of the coal strike. The two strikes together involved about 800,000 workers. An alarmed Congress hastened to set up an investigating committee to look into the causes of the coal strike.

The committee submitted to the Senate a draft resolution containing a proposal to use force against the strikers. Soon a federal court intervened with a ruling that the miners' strike was illegal. The court ordered the union to revoke the strike decision and cease all aid to the striking miners. The A.F.L. executive council announced its opposition to the strike and on November 11 the miners' union leadership urged the workers to return to the mines. But despite all this, the miners continued their strike.

In search for a way out of the impasse, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson tried unsuccessfully on November 18 to persuade the mineowners to negotiate with the union. Finally, President Wilson intervened personally, promising to consider the workers' demands as soon as they returned to the mines. Only then, under pressure from the Chief Executive, did the mineowners and the union agree to a 14 percent wage increase as proposed by the mediation commission.

On January 7, 1920, some miners agreed to call off the strike on the basis of the compromise agreement. But many,



including the miners in Illinois, did not find the compromise decision acceptable and continued the fight. Finally, on March 31, 1920, the mineowners agreed to a 27 percent wage increase to union members. The bulk of the miners stopped striking on these terms.

Taking vigorous action along with the steelworkers and the miners were the railroad workers. In February 1919, a plan for public ownership of the railroads, known as the Plumb plan<sup>1</sup> was brought before a Senate committee (since 1918 the railroads had been government-controlled). The plan had been endorsed by the four large independent Railroad Brotherhoods—the unions of locomotive engineers, firemen, conductors and trainmen—as well as by railroad workers' unions affiliated with the A.F.L. Together, the Brotherhoods and the A.F.L. unions represented 1,900,000 railroad workers. The Plumb plan envisaged that the U.S. Government would buy out all the railroads, whereupon they would be managed by a 15-member board of directors including five representatives of the public to be appointed by the President, five from the former owners and five from the unions. Operating profits were to be divided between the government and the workers; if the annual profits exceeded five percent railway rates were to be lowered. Implementation of the plan, in the view of its sponsors, would help establish a harmony of interests in society.

The head of the Locomotive Engineers Union, Warren Stone, explained that the Plumb plan reflected a desire on the part of labor organizations to move from wage demands to advocating a change in the system of profit distribution.

The railroad workers demanded that the government either establish a guaranteed minimum wage or carry out the Plumb plan. Otherwise, they threatened to strike.

These demands aroused indignation in Congress and the Administration. In August 1919, Congressmen Taft, Myers and others lashed out against the Plumb plan, calling it an example of the "Soviet system". In the meantime, the railroad companies declared that they would not yield an inch to the unions.

<sup>1</sup> *New Majority*, January 3, 1920. The plan was devised by Glen E. Plumb, a legal adviser to the Railroad Brotherhoods.

The conservative leaders of the Brotherhoods themselves became frightened by the sweep of the movement to nationalize the railroads. A strike did not enter into their plans at all, and seeking to avert it they were quick to agree with a decision made by the U.S. director-general of railroads to give the workers a four-cent-an-hour wage increase. "The rank-and-file railroad workers were furious," wrote John Reed. "Throughout America Wilson came to be called 'four-pence Woodrow'."<sup>1</sup> The railroad workers began preparations for a general strike.

The strike for a 25 to 40 percent wage increase began on September 1, 1919. On the next day, President Wilson proposed that a joint conference of labor unions, employers and farmers be held September 6 to 15 to discuss urgent issues. He indicated that he personally was in favor of an eight-hour day and a four-cent-an-hour wage boost for the railroad workers. Walker Hines, the U.S. director-general of railroads, took a stronger stand against the workers, threatening to resort to armed force if the strike were not terminated. The labor leaders also tried to hamper the development and expansion of the strike. All this, naturally, affected the course and outcome of the struggle.

On September 21, the press reported that the unions had accepted Wilson's conditions. The bulk of the railroad workers refrained from staging a general strike. Later on, they had to pay a heavy price for their naive faith in the President's promise, for the favorable moment was lost and the strike was thwarted, yet two million railroad workers remained in a position almost just as difficult as before. However, they could not put up with this, and before long strikes broke out on a number of railroads. The workers were demanding wage increases of 40 to 45 percent on the average.

On December 24, 1919, the President announced that the railroads would be restored to private operation as of March 1, 1920.

The railroad companies launched an offensive against the workers. Congress hastened to declare the strikes "illegal". In a number of cases, the government brought in federal troops

<sup>1</sup> Дж. Рид, *Революционное движение в Америке*. — «Коммунистический интернационал», 1920, № 9, стр. 1290.

and police. The courts decided one case after another in favor of the owners, and the conservative union leaders urged their members to return to work. In the end, the railroad companies, alarmed by the massive dimensions of the strikes, agreed to raise wages by 22 percent.

Thus, in the period under examination, major strikes occurred in the shipbuilding, steel, coal, textile, and railroad industries. In addition, there were many disputes in other sectors of the economy. The following figures give an idea of the scope of the strike movement in the period 1916-1920<sup>1</sup>:

Table 1

Year	Total disputes reported	Disputes in which number of workers was given		
		Work stoppages	Total number of workers involved (thousand)	Percent of total employed
1916	3,789	2,667	1,600	8.4
1917	4,450	2,325	1,230	6.3
1918	3,353	2,151	1,240	6.2
1919	3,630	2,665	4,160	20.8
1920	3,411	2,226	1,460	7.2

Throughout this period, the Gompersites in the A.F.L. and other unions joined efforts with the Wilson Administration and the monopolies in vain attempts to keep workers from striking. The workers, suffering from oppression by monopolies and the government, refused to submit and viewed strikes as the only weapon to protect their interests.

The strike movement of the early postwar years influenced the growth of labor unions. The A.F.L. membership grew from 2,020,000 in 1914 to 2,726,000 in 1918, 3,260,000 in 1919, and over 4,000,000 in 1920.<sup>2</sup> The ranks of organized workers on the railroads also grew.

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Department of Labor, *Strikes in the United States 1880-1936*, Bulletin No. 651, Washington, 1938, p. 39; *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 7, New York, 1926, p. 199; *The Economic Almanac 1951-1952*, New York, 1951, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 7, p. 84.

On the whole, union membership in all sectors of the economy grew from 3,467,000 in 1918 to 5,048,000 in 1920,<sup>1</sup> which was an important gain for the American working class.

The political consciousness of the workers also grew in the course of the strike struggle. Slowly but steadily their sense of class solidarity was awakened. They had to deal not only with the employers, but with the executive and legislative branches of the government. The strike movement would have been more effective, however, if the trade union leadership had not been under the thumb of the employers and the government and if they had not betrayed the workers at crucial points in the struggle.

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 98.



## CHAPTER II

## EMERGENCE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Communist Party of the United States was founded on September 1, 1919. This historic event took place against the background of intense class struggle within the country, a revolutionary upsurge in Europe and the battles fought by the Russian proletariat to establish a new socio-economic formation.

The roots of the communist movement in the United States go deep into the economic and political life of the country. The struggle to create a proletarian party in the United States was long and stubborn. The first American communist club was organized in New York as early as 1852, and Marxist groups appeared in the period of the First International, that is, in the 1860s and 1870s. These groups took an active part in the struggles of the American people for freedom and democracy. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the drive of American workers to unite and form their own organizations was reflected in the emergence of the Socialist Labor Party (S.L.P.), the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), the Socialist Party of America (S.P.A.), and the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.).

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a continued increase in the membership and influence of these organizations, with the exception of the S.L.P. (led by Daniel de Leon), which as a result of its mistaken policies found itself reduced to a small sectarian group. In 1912, the S.P.A. had over 120,000 members, which was an unquestionable success. Its left wing, which enhanced the influence of the Party among the masses,

began to rally and unite progressive forces around the *International Socialist Review*. This journal reprinted works of Marx and Engels and published revolutionary pamphlets, thereby helping to spread and develop Marxist theoretical thought in the United States.

The opportunist S.P.A. leaders were opposed to this development, and bitter strife developed within the Party, especially around the issues of what kind of a party it should be and how it should build its relations with the trade unions. The differences manifested themselves in full force at the Party's convention in May 1912, held in Indianapolis, where the right-centrist majority, headed by Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit, predominated. Of the 293 delegates present, only 30 had come from the midst of unskilled and semiskilled workers. William Haywood, a member of the S.P.A. National Executive Committee and an I.W.W. leader, represented the left wing of the Party. The convention devoted a great deal of attention to the question of the Party's attitude toward trade unions. A compromise resolution said that the Party had neither the right nor the desire to interfere in any disputes that might arise in the labor movement on organizational questions or methods employed in industrial struggles. However, the right-centrist leadership decided to deal a blow to the left wing by proposing an amendment to the Party's constitution, which stated: "Any member of the Party who opposes political action or advocates crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation, shall be expelled from membership in this Party."<sup>1</sup>

The right-centrist bloc succeeded in getting the amendment approved, thereby determining the political platform of the Socialist Party, the crux of which was repudiation of the class struggle and increased opposition to the left wing and the language federations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> The Socialist Party was structurally divided not only geographically but also along language lines. S. P. members who were immigrants and did not have a command of English became members of "language federations" (Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Latvian, Finnish, German, etc.).

The right wing at the convention sought to discredit William Haywood and to remove him from the Party's National Executive Committee. It also opposed nomination of Debs as the S.P.A. candidate for president. However, in the course of the struggle, the left-wing minority, led by William Haywood, strengthened its ideological positions and came out with sharp criticism of the right wing, denouncing its platform, which advocated staying always within the framework of legal action. But the left-wing program, along with its militant points which steered the S.P.A. onto the road of class struggle, had certain shortcomings: underestimation of the role of the party, exaggeration of the importance of individual political demands and illusions about so-called dual unionism, that is, the establishment of parallel but more radical trade unions to operate side by side with the A.F.L. unions and independent organizations.

In 1913, the right wing finally succeeded in removing Haywood from the S.P. Executive Committee. Many thousands of left-wing Socialists were expelled or left the Party on their own.

The split was a defeat for the left and at the same time greatly weakened the socialist movement as a whole. It revealed the baneful effect not only of opportunist tendencies which reduced the role of the Party to that of a simple election machine for election campaigns, but also of the extreme left, syndicalist tendencies which in practice undermined the Party and isolated its more militant, revolutionary elements from the broad sections of the working people.

By 1915, S.P. membership had dropped to 79,000. The Party lost its most active members, and its influence in the trade unions and among the masses of unorganized workers declined markedly. While during the 1912 presidential election its candidate Eugene Debs received 897,000 votes, in 1916, the Socialist presidential candidate Elmer Benson received only 585,000 votes. The Socialist Party shifted further to the right.<sup>1</sup>

During the war the struggle between the different trends within the Party increased, especially over such questions as attitude toward the war and the October Revolution in Russia.

<sup>1</sup> W. Z. Foster, *The Crisis in the Socialist Party*, New York, 1936, p. 34.

The left-wing internationalist Socialists—Charles Ruthenberg, Eugene Debs, John Reed, and William Haywood—condemned the perfidious actions of the leaders of the Second International and the entrance of the United States into the war. They hailed the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia. The social-chauvinists—John Spargo (a prominent Socialist leader from 1901 to 1917), Victor Berger and others—hiding behind “national defense” slogans, sought to distract the working class from the revolutionary struggle against the imperialist war.

There were also some centrists in the Party who fluctuated between the social-chauvinists and the internationalists. The chief exponent of centrism in the American socialist movement during World War I was Morris Hillquit. As a Socialist leader, he spoke of a just peace and internationalism, but in practice led the S.P. toward unity with the bourgeois parties.

Thus, there was a collision on the war question: the social-chauvinists supported U.S. entrance into the war, while the left-wing Socialists actively fought against it. The struggle went on for several years.

The year 1915 saw the founding in Boston of the Socialist Propaganda League of America, headed by Sebald J. Rutgers, a Dutch immigrant.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, the League moved to New York, where its connections expanded. It established contacts with the left wing of the S.P.A., which had not yet taken shape organizationally, with American internationalists, and a group of Russian Bolsheviks who had emigrated to the United States after the 1905 revolution. The League fought the right-wing leadership of the S.P.A. and sided with the Zimmerwald left<sup>2</sup> on the war issue. “This League,” he wrote to A. Kollontai on March 19, 1916, “is internationalist, with a program clearly tending to the left.”<sup>3</sup>

Left elements began to gather around the League. The right-

<sup>1</sup> Sebald J. Rutgers (1879-1961), a Dutch Communist. Between 1918 and 1938, worked intermittently in the U.S.S.R., then went to the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> The Zimmerwald Left was an international group of Russian, German, Polish and Swiss left-wing Social-Democrats formed by Lenin in 1915 at the First Socialist Conference of Internationalists in Zimmerwald, Switzerland. In 1919 the group served as the nucleus for the Communist International.—Ed.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 373.



wing members of the Socialist Party's National Executive Committee saw in the League an ideological foe and began to fight it.

There was a different attitude toward the League, however, among the Socialist rank and file. Dissatisfied with the policies and tactics of the right-wing leadership, they demanded that a convention be called to consider the tasks of the Party in connection with the new situation at home and abroad, and especially to define the Party's attitude toward the war, which the United States was about to enter.

The Party's attitude toward the war was the main question on the agenda of the S.P. convention held in April 1917 in St. Louis, Missouri. Upon the insistence of the left elements, headed by Ruthenberg, the convention adopted a resolution denouncing the imperialist war and government propaganda about U.S. readiness to enter it. However, after the United States declared war on Germany, Morris Hillquit and other Socialist leaders repudiated the resolution. Some Party leaders—Benson, Spargo and others—joined with Gompers in creating the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy. A declaration issued by the new Alliance said: "...As labor unionists, social reformers and socialists, we pledge our loyal support and service to the United States Government and its allies in the present world conflict."<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the Alliance became an auxiliary government agency for mobilizing human and material resources for the imperialist war. Gompers, Spargo and others, in close unity with President Wilson, waged a vigorous campaign for U.S. participation in the war under the pretext of "preserving democracy" and concluding "an honorable peace".

The internationalists exposed the real instigators of the war, revealed its causes and pointed the way out of it for the people. On September 11, 1915, addressing himself to the socialist betrayers of the Second International, Eugene Debs flung these forceful words of protest against the imperialist war: "When I say I am opposed to war I mean ruling class war, for the ruling class is the only class that makes war.... I am opposed

<sup>1</sup> *American Federation of Labor, History, Encyclopedia, Reference Book*, Prepared and Published by Authority of the 1916 and 1917 Conventions, Washington, 1919, pp. 72-74.

to it, and I would be shot for treason before I would enter such a war."<sup>1</sup> Other left-wing Socialists, many of whom were soon to become ardent Communists, spoke with no less passion.

A few days before the United States entered the war, John Reed wrote in an article entitled "Whose War?" that "toilers don't want war", and that the war was begun against their will. "But the speculators, the employers, the plutocracy—they want it, just as they did in Germany and in England; and with lies and sophistries they will whip up our blood until we are savage—and then we'll fight and die for them.... It is not our war."<sup>2</sup>

In a speech on May 27, 1917, Charles Ruthenberg said: "This is not a war for freedom. It is not a war for the liberties of mankind. It is a war to secure the investments and profits of the ruling class of this country.... We are working towards this end, that out of the chaos of this war there may come a new society, a new world, a new organization of the people, which will end the cause of the industry which brings war into existence...."<sup>3</sup>

A struggle also raged around the Party's attitude toward the Great October Socialist Revolution. The right-wing elements regarded it with hostility, while the leftists spoke out in defense of its gains and opposed the armed intervention by the United States and other powers in the internal affairs of Soviet Russia. As a result of the struggle between the two trends in the S.P.A., the left wing grew noticeably stronger. After it was organizationally formed at the 1918 convention in New York, it united with the Socialist Propaganda League.

From late 1918, the *Revolutionary Age* weekly became the herald of the left wing. It advocated the Socialist Party's withdrawal from the Second International and joining the Third International; it fought against reformism and opportunism in the S.P., and campaigned for the establishment of a revolutionary party. This struggle increased especially after a group of left-wing Socialists, headed by John Reed and others, published in March 1919 the Left Wing Manifesto and Program.

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches of Eugene V. Debs. Voices of Revolt*, Vol. IX, New York, 1928, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *The Masses*, New York, April 1917, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Charles E. Ruthenberg, *Speeches and Writings*, New York, 1928, pp. 40-41.

The Manifesto pointed to the existence of tactical differences between the left-wing and right-wing Socialists, and said that while the right wing obstructed the development of the class struggle, the left wing called on the Party to provide comprehensive support and guidance to the revolutionary activity of the masses. The document warned workers of the danger of blind faith in bourgeois reforms, explaining that capitalists wanted to make use of labor organizations to achieve their own imperialist aims.<sup>1</sup>

The Left Wing Manifesto and Program testified to the ideological growth of the progressive American Socialists who were now working toward the creation of a communist party. These documents showed that the left wing of the S.P. had made a big step forward in its development in 1918-1919. As a consequence, its influence grew rapidly. In April 1919, the Party's language federations, with a total membership of 25,000, went over completely to the left wing.

The left-wing Socialists set about spreading Marxist-Leninist ideas. Among the first works to be published in 1918-1919 were Lenin's articles and pamphlets *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, *The State and Revolution*, *The Lessons of the Revolution*, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, *Political Parties in Russia*, *Letter to American Workers*, and *Letter to the Workers of Europe and America*. Many of Lenin's works and letters were published in the progressive periodical press.

Also brought to public attention were the decrees of the Soviet Government and other documents concerning the great social transformations in Russia, as well as documents adopted in March 1919 at the First Congress of the Communist International, especially the Program and Manifesto of the Communist International. Such works of Marx and Engels as *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *The Civil War in France*, *Capital*, *A Critique of Political Economy*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and others came out in several editions.

<sup>1</sup> *Manifesto and Program. Constitution. Report to the Communist International*, Pamphlet I. Communist Party of America, Chicago, 1920, p. 32.

The left wing of the Socialist Party set up several new newspapers and magazines, the largest being the monthly *Class Struggle* (1917), the weekly *Proletarian* (1918) and *Communist* (1919) all published in Chicago, and *Socialist News* in Cleveland. In April 1919, the weekly *Communist* began publication in New York under the supervision of John Reed. The older magazine *Liberator*, where John Reed was for a time on the editorial board, continued.

When news came of the forthcoming international conference to establish the Third International (the Communist International, or the Comintern), the Socialist left wing demanded that the National Executive Committee call a Party convention. They insisted that the S.P.A. take part in the work of the conference and that it define its attitude toward the Soviet Republic more specifically. The Executive Committee, disturbed by the increased activity of the left wing, held off calling a convention, whereupon local Party organizations and language federations at their own initiative conducted a Party referendum with a call to join the Third International and support the Soviets in Russia.

Soon, elections to Party bodies were held throughout the country. About 80 percent of the Socialist membership voted for left-wing candidates. Of the 15 members of the newly elected Executive Committee, 12 were from the left wing (John Reed, Alfred Martin, Alfred Wagenknecht, Charles Ruthenberg, and others). However, Hillquit, Berger and others, in an effort to retain leadership, refused to recognize both the referendum and the results of the elections. At a meeting held between May 24 and 30, 1919, the former National Executive Committee expelled seven of the 12 language federations from the Party (the Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Yugoslav), as well as the entire Michigan organization, in order to assure themselves a majority at the upcoming extraordinary convention (August 1919). Finally, the Party organizations of the states of Massachusetts, Ohio, and of Chicago, New York, and other centers were also expelled. All told, 55,000 of the most active Socialists were driven out of the Party,<sup>1</sup> that is more than 50 percent of its members.

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 163.



This operation against the left wing was carried through by National Executive Committee members A. Shiplacoff, James Oneal, G. H. Goebel, Fred Krafft, Seymour Stedman, Dan Hogan, John M. Work, M. Holt. Two left-wing representatives at that meeting, Wagenknecht and L. Katterfeld, were unable to block the decision. Five National Executive Committee members (Hillquit, Berger, and three others) were absent, but they, too, bore responsibility for driving members out of the Party. Hillquit, for example, though then sick in the hospital, engineered the whole shameful business.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, local Party organizations in Boston, Cleveland and New York proposed that a conference of left-wing representatives be called in order to discuss the situation. The appeal found response among the many thousands of rank-and-file Party members, and 94 delegates from 20 large industrial cities attended the national convention of the socialist left wing which opened on June 21, 1919, in New York.

The conference became the scene of a heated debate over the situation in the Party and the prospects of an extraordinary Party convention. In the course of the debate, the left split. The traditional sectarianism had its baneful effect here as well.

Most of the delegates (55)—Reed, Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht included—were against a hasty break with the Socialist Party, preferring rather to steer a course toward winning vacillating elements to their side. The delegates in this group said, furthermore, that a considerable part of the English section of the Party was not prepared for an organizational break. They suggested refraining from taking such quick and direct action so as not to give the opportunist S. P. leadership a chance to put the blame for the split on the left wing. The disagreements within the left were intensified by different views on the position of language federations within the Party and by the existence of a certain amount of factionalism.

The majority, made up mainly of members who were American or spoke English, decided to continue the struggle

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

against opportunism within the Party to a victorious end, and to leave the question of the future of the Party until the extraordinary convention, which was scheduled for August 30, in Chicago. It was also decided that if the left wing did not succeed in winning over a majority at the convention, it would create a communist party.

The minority delegates (38) insisted on withdrawing from the S.P. and calling a national convention on September 1, 1919, in Chicago with the purpose of forming a communist party. Dennis Batt from Detroit (later a renegade) made this motion. It was supported by delegates from Michigan, Massachusetts, Ohio and from the seven language federations expelled from the Party.

On August 30, an extraordinary convention of the Socialist Party was held in Chicago. The majority group within the S.P. left wing, headed by John Reed and Alfred Wagenknecht, failed in their attempt to take part in its work. At the request of S.P. Secretary Adolf Germer, the Chicago police kept the left-wing delegates out of the convention hall. These delegates then convened an extraordinary convention of their own on August 31, also in Chicago. In attendance were 92 delegates representing 10,000 members. This convention laid the foundation for a new party to be called the Communist Labor Party of America (C.L.P.A.). Alfred Wagenknecht was elected its first secretary.

The minority of the S.P. left wing, in turn, held a convention in Chicago on September 1, 1919, and proclaimed the founding of the Communist Party of America (C.P.A.). Charles Ruthenberg, who shortly before had gone over to the side of the minority leftists, was elected its first secretary. The C.P.A. consisted basically of Communists organized in the language federations (German, Hungarian, Jewish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and others) plus a small number of English-speaking Communists. The 128 delegates at the C.P.A. organizing convention represented about 58,000 members.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to bring the two communist conventions together were unsuccessful. Participants of the C.L.P.A. convention

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 171; *Manifesto and Program. Constitution. Report to the Communist International*, Pamphlet I. Communist Party of America, p. 37.

proposed that they be accepted collectively into the C.P.A. But this proposal was turned down, the C.P.A. delegates insisting on individual acceptance.

The journal *Communist* became the press organ of the C.P.A. and *The Toiler*, formerly called *Socialist News*, became the organ of the C.L.P.A. The C.L.P.A. headquarters were located in Cleveland, while those of the C.P.A. were in Chicago.

The newly formed parties continued their work independently of each other, but there were no fundamental ideological differences between them. They both stood basically on Marxist positions. The programs adopted at both of the above-mentioned founding conventions were based on the Socialist Left Wing Manifesto and Program. They revealed the essence of imperialism as the manifestation of monopoly dominance, exposed the bankruptcy of American bourgeois democracy, spoke of the need to abolish the capitalist system of production and create an industrial republic in which all industrial production would be socialized. Both parties resolved at their conventions to join the Communist International.

From the very first days of the existence of the Communist Parties, the ruling circles of the U.S. began to terrorize them, at the same time persecuting progressive-minded Americans who expressed sympathy with Soviet Russia.

The persecution of democratic organizations became particularly rampant in November 1919. The Department of Justice and its bureau of investigation headed by A. Mitchell Palmer made raids on labor and communist organizations. Raids in Chicago and Detroit were particularly brutal. "In the Detroit raid about 800 persons were arrested and imprisoned from three to six days in a dark, windowless, narrow corridor in the city's antiquated Federal Building."<sup>1</sup> On January 1, 1920, 70 labor clubs in Chicago were raided. Among those arrested was Bill Haywood. On the next day, democratic organizations in various states were likewise subjected to attacks.

"Through the night of January 2, 1920, the white terror reached its climax. It is impossible to know how many persons ... were arrested in the raids of that night and detained for

<sup>1</sup> Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare. A Study of National Hysteria, 1919-1920*, New York, 1955, p. 215.

periods running from a few hours to many months. It is estimated in the evidence before the Senate Committee ... that approximately 10,000 persons were arrested, that 6,530 Labor Department warrants were applied for either before or after the arrests (most after)..."<sup>1</sup> Many communist and labor leaders were victims of repression. Communist publications were confiscated and destroyed, newspapers and magazines closed down.

In Chicago, 85 Communists were charged with violating a law against inciting to riot, and 38 C.L.P. leaders were prosecuted for singing "The Red Flag" at the convention in Chicago, declaring solidarity with the Soviet Republic, and endorsing the Socialist Left Wing Manifesto.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. Government became notorious for its brutality and injustice. In their 1920 election platform, the Socialists stated that President Wilson and officials of his Administration frequently abused their rights, and that Congress passed laws which clearly violated the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

A group of American lawyers publicly denounced the terror. The opening statement of the Twelve Lawyers' Report was as follows:

"To the American people:

"For more than six months we, the undersigned lawyers, whose sworn duty it is to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States, have seen with growing apprehension the continued violation of the Constitution and breaking of those Laws by the Department of Justice of the United States Government.

"Under the guise of a campaign for the suppression of radical activities, the office of the Attorney General, acting by its local agents throughout the country, and giving express instructions from Washington, has committed illegal acts. Wholesale arrests both of aliens and citizens have been made without warrant or any process of law; men and women have been jailed and held *incommunicado* without access of friends or counsel; homes have been entered without search-warrant

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1921-1922*, Vol. 4, New York, 1922, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> *The World Almanac and Encyclopedia for 1921*, p. 662.



and property seized and removed; other property has been wantonly destroyed; workingmen and workingwomen suspected of radical views have been shamefully abused and maltreated. Agents of the Department of Justice have been introduced into radical organizations for the purpose of informing upon their members or inciting them to activities; these agents have even been instructed from Washington to arrange meetings upon certain dates for the express object of facilitating wholesale raids and arrests."<sup>1</sup>

Federal courts were forced to maneuver and start some investigations of the raids in order to placate the public. The "war against radicalism" also manifested itself in an attack on bourgeois legality, on freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and the right to send representatives to elective government bodies. College, university and school teachers suspected of radicalism were discharged, above all those who were members of a labor union or spoke out in favor of forming one.

The Post Office Department kept labor and socialist newspapers and magazines under strict control, impeding their publication and distribution in every way possible. Federal authorities ordered raids on opposition press organs. A number of publications were destroyed or confiscated, and people on the editorial staffs were fined and arrested.

The objective of this harassment was to prevent the development of the communist movement, to weaken the labor movement and thereby to protect the interests of big capital.

The police raids and the persecution and arrests of Communists and progressive workers had an adverse effect on the communist movement in America. Many Communists were arrested, and thousands gave up their Communist Party membership out of fear of repression.

For the time being the Communist Parties had to operate from an illegal position. Charles Ruthenberg wrote in March 1923 that Communists did not have any particular love for life underground or for secret work. They had nothing to hide. They wanted nothing other than to proclaim their principles openly to the whole country.

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1921-1922*, Vol. 4, p. 38.

Though forced underground, neither Party ceased its activities. The task facing them was to unite their forces. In January 1920, they reached a preliminary agreement to form a United Bureau, which was to call a convention of the Parties with the aim of uniting and electing a leadership.

At the underground convention that took place in May 1920, in Bridgman, Michigan, the United Communist Party of America was formed. It included most of the members of the two former Parties. A resolution was also passed on measures for the complete unification of all Communists into a single party.

The convention worked out and adopted the program and constitution of the United Communist Party of America. The program analyzed the class essence of the American bourgeois state and proclaimed that the task of the Party was to unite workers on a class basis. It specified the necessity of communist participation in strikes with the purpose of giving them political meaning and importance. The Party called on its members to work among Black workers with the aim of uniting them with all class-conscious workers.

These principles were a step forward in comparison with the corresponding points in the former programs. However, the new program did contain some points that proved to be unjustified. For example, it came out against Communists working within the A.F.L., something that could only bring about their isolation from the labor movement.

The convention elected a Central Executive Committee consisting of five representatives from each of the former Parties. Alfred Wagenknecht was elected executive secretary of the new Party, and Charles Ruthenberg became the editor of the Party organ, *Communist*.

The creation of the single party did not, however, remove the danger of further splits. Indeed, in mid-July 1920, part of the members broke away from the United Communist Party, reducing its membership to 7,000. The breakaway representatives, 34 delegates representing 8,500 members, gathered in New York in July 1920 for an underground convention. No important changes were introduced into the previous program at that convention, except for rejecting the tactics of splitting the A.F.L. This faction retained the old name — the Commun-

ist Party of America. Charles Dirba was elected executive secretary.

Under these circumstances, the problem of uniting the communist forces into a single party was far from being solved.

In an effort to overcome the obstacles to reunification, the leaders of these parties turned to the Executive Committee of the Comintern for help. The advice given them was to do their duty to the working class and unite. This decision, however, did not eliminate the difficulties involved. Negotiations between the Parties took time and effort, and it was only in May 1921 that they finally met in convention and merged. The convention worked out and adopted a program for the new Party, which was called the Communist Party of America.<sup>1</sup>

Among the issues thrashed out at the convention was that of communist tactics in the labor movement. The delegates discussed the question of the Communist Party's attitude toward dual unionism, that is, whether the Communists should create parallel trade unions, or whether they should work within the already existing mass trade unions even if their leadership pursued a reactionary policy. The convention denounced as extremist the policy of developing a parallel trade union movement out of revolutionary elements, and oriented the Communists toward work in the mass A.F.L. and other unions.

This decision was undoubtedly influenced by Lenin's work, "*Left-Wing" Communism—an Infantile Disorder*, one section of which, "Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?", the American communist press printed in October 1920, while the whole book came out in English in the United States in January 1921. Lenin urged foreign Communists to learn "how to conduct revolutionary work within the reactionary trade unions", adding that they "must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found, ...convince the backward elements, to work among them, and not to fence themselves off from them with artificial and childish 'Left' slogans".<sup>2</sup>

The convention also devoted considerable attention to the question of Party structure. It was decided to retain the

<sup>1</sup> For more details see, William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, pp. 180-82.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 46, 53, 54.

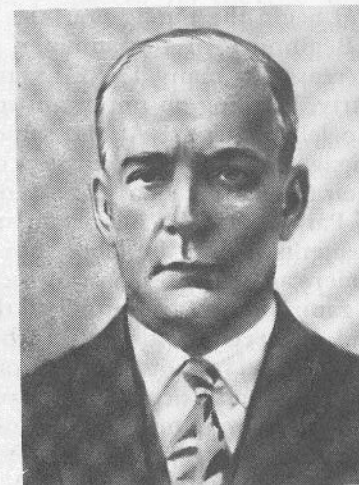
language federations, but to limit their autonomy, confining their functions to political education in the various languages.

Charles Ruthenberg became executive secretary of the C.P.A., and a ten-man National Executive Committee was elected, with five representatives from each Party. It was decided to locate the Party headquarters in New York.

In the fall of 1921, several C.P.A. candidates ran in local elections. This step marked the beginning of publicizing communist political principles through election campaigns.

The Party outlined a number of measures for work in the labor unions. William Z. Foster played a prominent role in working out certain questions connected with this aspect of the Party's activity.

Although he did not become a Party member until 1921, his entire activity was, in fact, connected with the communist movement. As head of the Trade Union Educational League (T.U.E.L.) he took part in the work of the first congress of the Trade Union International (Profintern), which took place July 3-19, 1921, in Moscow. His visit to Soviet Russia and his meeting with Lenin during the sessions of the Third Congress of the Comintern (June 29-July 12) had a great influence on Foster. "In my experiences," he wrote later, "I have met with many leaders of labor, but never before or since with one who thrilled me so deeply as the great Lenin...."<sup>1</sup> In a talk on July 5, 1921, with delegates from the Communist Party of America who were taking part in the Third Congress of the Comintern, Lenin expressed the view that American Communists were far



4. Charles Ruthenberg, one of the founders and leaders of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.

<sup>1</sup> *Political Affairs*, April 1960, p. 18.



from making full use of all the legal possibilities available to them. He suggested that they expand the work of publicizing the principles of communism, use legal means in political work, and begin the publication of a daily newspaper.

Beginning in the summer of 1921, C.P.A. membership increased as many T.U.E.L. and I.W.W. members joined the Party, marking an important step toward drawing it closer to the labor unions. At the same time, the Communists were engaged in a lively discussion on the question of broadening their ties with the masses and combining legal and illegal forms of Party work. An important step toward uniting democratic elements within the labor movement was the creation of the American Labor Alliance, which included a number of labor organizations representing all the regions of the United States and different trends in the labor movement.

With the support of the Communist Party, which was still underground, the executive committee of the Labor Alliance worked to unite progressive workers into a new legal party. An organizing convention met December 23-26, 1921, in New York. Taking part were 150 delegates from the American Labor Alliance, the Workers Council and affiliated organizations. The convention proclaimed the formation of a legal party, the Workers Party of America, adopted its program and constitution, and elected a Central Executive Committee of 17 members (Alexander Trachtenberg, J. L. Engdahl, R. Minor, C. Harrison and others), with Charles Ruthenberg as executive secretary. The newspaper *Worker* became the official organ of the Party.

At the close of 1921, the Communist Party became the target of a fresh wave of repression as Department of Justice informers betrayed one prominent Party figure after another. In August 1922, the C.P.A. held a convention in Bridgman, Michigan, where the question of going over to a legal status was to be in the focus of attention. Over 70 delegates gathered for the convention — including one who was an agent provocateur. The Party learned of the impending danger, and many delegates dispersed in time. But 17 delegates, with Charles Ruthenberg among them, were arrested on August 22, 1922.

All those arrested were charged with violating a Michigan law against criminal syndicalism. Foster's trial in March 1923

backfired on those who staged it. Foster defended himself courageously, and Charles Ruthenberg called in as a witness actually delivered an accusatory speech. As the two men testified they exposed the gross falsehoods about the so-called subversive activity of the Reds. Foster's acquittal was an important victory for the Communist Party in its struggle for free speech and civil rights for all Americans.

On April 7, 1923, the C.P.A. announced its full consolidation with the Workers Party. A single legal party of the American proletariat was thus created, the Workers' Communist Party of America.

The proceedings against Charles Ruthenberg which began April 16, 1923, went on for almost two years and ended in his acquittal.

"No matter what one thinks of Bolshevism, it is undeniable that the Russian Revolution is one of the great events of human history, and the rise of the Bolsheviki a phenomenon of world-wide importance."<sup>1</sup> Thus wrote John Reed of the October Revolution in Russia. This view was shared by those of his fellow-countrymen who were able to learn the truth about the revolutionary events. But while the October Revolution generated profound feelings of sympathy in progressive America, it evoked just as strong feelings of wrath and hatred in bourgeois America. "The Bolsheviks have put Russia outside the pale of civilized, recognizable Governments," declared the bourgeois press.<sup>2</sup> The foes of Soviet Russia hoped for its demise and employed every economic, diplomatic and military means in an effort to strangle the young republic. They first staked their hopes on internal counterrevolution, but it was defeated. Later they pinned their hopes on famine, but the people, led by the Bolsheviks, overcame that as well. Woodrow Wilson's Fifteen-Point Program aimed at mustering capitalist forces against the first socialist country proved of no avail either.

At the beginning of 1918, the imperialists of a number of countries devised a plan for an armed intervention in the

<sup>1</sup> John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, New York, 1926, p. XII.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times*, November 25, 1917, Part II, p. 2, quote from *American Opinion About Russia 1917-1920*, by Leonid I. Strakhovsky, Toronto, 1961, p. 33.

Soviet Republic, whereupon U.S., British, French, Italian and Japanese troops were landed on Soviet soil. The U.S.A. became a participant in the intervention against the world's first proletarian state.<sup>1</sup>



5. John Reed, outstanding publicist and one of the founders of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.

Under Lenin's guidance, the Russian Communist Party and the Soviet Government led the people to final victory over the internal and external counterrevolution. The just cause of the Soviet people was supported by the working people of the capitalist countries, and this was one of the indications of the international impact of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Democratic forces in other countries, the United States included, launched a movement under the slogan "Hands Off Soviet Russia".

On the diplomatic front, the Soviet Government consistently

strove to create favorable conditions for establishing peaceful relations. It advocated normalizing Soviet-American relations and came out with concrete proposals on this question.

While bourgeois statesmen failed to respond to the appeals of the Soviet Government, progressive Americans greeted them warmly. They denounced the Wilson Administration's

<sup>1</sup> И. М. Краснов, *Классовая борьба в США и движения против антисоветской интервенции*, Moscow, 1961.

policy of intervention and demanded withdrawal of U.S. troops from Soviet Russia and the establishment of normal American-Soviet relations.

The struggle of the U.S. progressive forces for peace and normalization of diplomatic and trade relations with Russia and against the intervention and blockade developed in many directions. It involved such things as spreading authentic information about the Russian revolution and holding "Hands Off Soviet Russia" mass meetings and demonstrations. Longshoremen and merchant seamen refused to load and transport military equipment for the Russian whiteguard. The progressive press campaigned against the illegal actions of the U.S. Government as one of the instigators of the anti-Soviet intervention.

The militant "Hands Off Soviet Russia" slogan of the left wing of the Socialist Party found increasingly widespread response. At numerous meetings across the country, participants in the solidarity movement sent greetings to the workers of Soviet Russia with expressions of sympathy with their struggle and demands for the withdrawal of American troops from Russia. Such letters and resolutions were sent by workers in Seattle, New York, Boston and elsewhere. The Socialist Propaganda League and the I.W.W. played a prominent role in such meetings. The Socialist Party convention held in August 1918 in Chicago noted that the incursion of American troops into Soviet Russia was a crime against both the American people and the peoples of the whole world.

A resolution calling for the withdrawal of American troops from Russia was adopted by the 1,200 delegates present at a congress of labor representatives held in Chicago in January 1919. "Support Soviet Russia" and "Hands Off Russia" were among the central slogans during May Day demonstrations that year. One of the largest was in Cleveland, where 50,000 workers took part.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1919, progressive Americans welcomed the news that the Soviet Government had established its mission in New York and appointed Ludwig Martens as the official

<sup>1</sup> *Liberator*, March 1919, pp. 21, 23; *The Communist*, Vol. IX, No. 5, May 1930, pp. 436-37.



representative of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R.).<sup>1</sup> This measure pursued the aim of establishing trade, economic and other relations with the United States.<sup>2</sup> On March 31, 1919, a meeting of Socialist Party representatives, held in Passaic, New Jersey, sent a message of greetings to Martens, which expressed the desire to establish ties between American and Soviet workers. The participants in that meeting demanded of their Government that American troops be withdrawn from Russia.<sup>3</sup>

In May 1919, a convention of the Young People's Socialist League demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Russia. Greetings to the Soviet Republic and demands that the U.S. Government cease all aid to the Russian counter-revolutionaries and lift the blockade against Soviet Russia were voiced at meetings in Madison Square Garden in May and June. The participants in the June meeting denounced the police raids. A number of American labor organizations called for U.S. recognition of Soviet Russia. The socialist newspaper, *New York Call*, reported that in the fall of 1919 a new wave of worker demonstrations had rolled across the country with demands for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Russia.

The progressive press campaigned vigorously against the intervention and blockade. In a leaflet entitled "Hands Off Soviet Russia", the Communist Party called on workers to step up their actions against the intervention. Said the leaflet: "Your slogan must be: *Not a soldier for war against Soviet Russia, not a cent, not a rifle to help wage this war.*" *New Solidarity*,

<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Government refused to recognize Martens as the Soviet representative, stating that the only Russian representative it recognized was B. A. Bakhmetyev, the former Ambassador of the Provisional Government, whose credentials had been invalidated by the Soviet Government.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the Soviet Government's efforts along these lines see, Г. Б. Рейхберг и Б. С. Шапик.—*Дело Мартенса*, Moscow, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> *Revolutionary Radicalism, Report of the Joint Legislative Committee, Investigating Seditious Activities, Filed April 24, 1920, in the Senate of the State of New York*, Vol. I, Part I, Albany, 1920, pp. 640-41.

<sup>4</sup> *The Class Struggle*, Vol. III, No. 4, November 1919, pp. 354-55.

the I.W.W. organ published in Chicago, wrote in its November 25, 1919 issue, "If our object is to help the Soviets, the best way is to organize for our own freedom."<sup>1</sup> The magazine *The Class Struggle* published an address from an international group of Communists to American and British soldiers, entitled, "Why Don't They Bring You Home?" Materials under the heading "Truth About Russia" were printed in other labor and communist periodicals.

In the fall of 1919, longshoremen in Seattle joining in the "Hands Off Soviet Russia" movement refused to load military supplies for Admiral Kolchak who led the counterrevolutionary forces in Siberia. The whiteguard envoy, Bakhmetyev, reported in a telegram from Washington to the counter-revolutionary headquarters in Omsk that it was only with the active help of the Wilson Administration that he succeeded, after a three-week delay, in getting the ship on its way. Explaining the reason for the hold up, he said that the workers had refused to load rifles, about the arrival of which they had been forewarned by workers in Bridgeport. The American Government, he said, made every effort to help expedite the loading.

Longshoremen in Baltimore and Portland (Oregon) also refused to load arms for the whiteguard and the interventionists, and the Baltimore longshoremen staged a work stoppage in protest against arms shipments to Russia. The strike caused a stir in Congress.

The mass protests had their effect. At the beginning of 1920, the U.S. Government decided to withdraw its troops from Russia. But it hoped that, once the troops were withdrawn, it could put an end to the Soviet Republic by making a cat's paw of its allies, and hence continued to arm the internal counterrevolution and encourage it to expand the civil war.

The Red Army victory in the war with Poland in the summer of 1920, the subsequent defeat of Wrangel's army, and the conclusion on October 20, 1920, of a peace treaty between Poland and Soviet Russia signified the failure of the cat's paw policies of the American imperialists. Once again, an important

<sup>1</sup> *Revolutionary Radicalism, Its History, Purpose and Tactics*, Vol. II, Part I, Albany, 1920, pp. 1188-89.

role in frustrating the imperialists' aggressive plans was played by proletarian internationalism. "The international bourgeoisie," Lenin said, "has only to raise a hand against us to have it seized by its own workers."<sup>1</sup>

The struggle waged by working people against the intervention and for normalization of American-Soviet relations gave vital support to the peoples of Russia. Within the U.S. labor movement many democratic organizations and societies had been formed for the purpose of working against the intervention and economic blockade, and for normalization of diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviet Republic.

An important contribution to this struggle was made by the Friends of Soviet Russia League, which proclaimed its chief objectives to be the adoption by the United States of a just policy toward Russia and the withdrawal of all American soldiers from Russian soil. The League maintained that Soviet Russia's right to revolution was a sacred right of its people, just as this right was recognized for the American people by the Declaration of Independence. If there are any disputes or differences between the United States and the Soviet Government, the League declared, they should be settled peacefully, for the Soviet Government has repeatedly declared its readiness to conclude peace treaties with all states.

As it worked to spread the truth about the revolution in Russia as the legitimate expression of the will of the overwhelming majority of the Russian people, the League went further than bringing its program to public notice. It sponsored a petition to Congress calling for the lifting of the blockade against Russia, withdrawal of all American troops, an end to all cooperation with counterrevolutionary groups led by Kolchak, Denikin and the like, and abstention from any action that would interfere with the Russian people's right to choose their own form of government.

The petition received wide support, especially among workers in New York. At the League's initiative, the International Congress of Working Women in November 1919 in Washington passed a resolution protesting against the economic blockade and demanding the removal of all restric-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 309.

tions on sending food supplies to Russia. After the American intervention ended, the Friends of Soviet Russia League stepped up its fund-raising drive to send material assistance to the Soviet Republic, which was threatened with famine as a result of the foreign intervention and blockade. Suffice it to say that prior to August 1922, 17 ships loaded with food, machinery and other supplies purchased with money collected by the Friends of Soviet Russia League were sent from New York to Russia. In addition, another ten ships sailed from West Coast ports.

A number of newly formed organizations joined the aid-to-Russia campaign, and some American trade unions took an active part in organizing famine relief operations. Among the latter, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, headed by Sidney Hillman, played a prominent role. In 1921, that union organized a movement among American workers to help the hungry in Russia. In a letter to Hillman dated October 13, 1921, Lenin wrote, "I thank you with all my heart for your help. Thanks to you an agreement was rapidly achieved on organization of help for Soviet Russia by the American workers. Particularly important is the fact that the organization of this aid has now been arranged in respect also of those workers who are *not* Communists."<sup>1</sup> Hillman himself was a representative of such non-communist workers. Although in subsequent years he was opposed to communism, in the early 1920s he did much to help starving Russian workers.

In Lenin's view the assistance given by American workers in those difficult days was particularly important. He wrote: "America, naturally, is at the head of the states where the workers can help us, are already helping us and will help—I am profoundly confident—on a far greater scale."<sup>2</sup>

The American intellectuals also took part in this noble cause. Many, for example, contributed by organizing shipments of medical supplies. On September 2, 1920, a meeting took place in New York where speakers demanded normalization of American-Soviet relations, explaining that the population of Russia was suffering from a shortage of medicine, shoes and

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



clothing largely because of the blockade and the support given to the counterrevolution by the Entente. The Federation of Labor in Chicago, the Central Labor Council in Seattle and many other labor organizations voiced similar demands.

When U.S. troops were sent to Murmansk and Vladivostok in the spring of 1918, they were told that they were going there to protect the security of their country and to help the Russians in the struggle against the Germans. But their first contacts with the revolutionary events in Russia convinced them that they were really being used to protect the rule of the landowners and capitalists, and to strangle the Russian revolution.

Morale began to decline in the American units from the very outset of the intervention, and was particularly low after American troops were defeated at Kadysh and Shenskursk in the winter of 1918-1919. Reports from the American chargé d'affaires indicated that an armed insurrection was in the making among them. In January 1919, in the Supreme Council of the Entente, President Wilson expressed serious apprehensions about the fact that British and American soldiers were refusing to fight the Bolsheviks.

In the United States, an increasing number of Americans were asking why American troops had to stay in Russia. Getting no plausible answer from their government and congressmen, they joined the fight to bring the troops back, stop the intervention, and lift the blockade. Lenin noted that in America, the strongest and youngest capitalist country, "workers have tremendous sympathy with the Soviets."<sup>1</sup>

The "Hands Off Soviet Russia" movement of progressive American workers and intellectuals was of great importance. Although it did not express the opinion of the majority of the American people who were deceived by false propaganda about Soviet Russia, it was nonetheless aimed at supporting the Soviets and the just cause of the people. The participation of working people in the movement showed their feelings of solidarity with the revolutionary people of the Soviet Republic and the growing class consciousness of progressive American workers.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 479.

### CHAPTER III

#### STRIKES AND THE POLICIES OF LABOR UNIONS

In mid-1920, an economic crisis began in the United States which continued until late 1921, affecting not only industry, but agriculture and foreign trade as well. The industrial production index dropped 23 points, with the coal, iron, steel and copper industries hit most strongly. It was a short but serious crisis. The slump in industrial production was caused primarily by cutbacks in military contracts and a drop in the purchasing power of the population.

The crisis hit the working class severely. Compared with 1919, the number of employed workers dropped 22.8 percent, and unemployment reached a figure of 4,270,000 in 1921. The high unemployment rate depressed wages, with the annual wage fund shrinking from \$12.9 billion in 1920 to \$8.2 billion in 1921. The average annual wages were below \$1,000 in ten states in 1920, and in 14 states in 1921.

In the second half of 1921, the country's economy began to pull out of the crisis. In 1922, production was up, especially in auto manufacturing, electricity and oil extraction. Prices began to rise, domestic and foreign trade turnover expanded, and profits rose. The unemployment rate, however, remained high.

The Administration of President Harding, which replaced the Wilson Administration in March 1921, was greatly disturbed by the huge unemployment figure. In September 1921, this problem was discussed at a conference of representatives of business circles and the A.F.L. The need for expanding public works, above all in the fields of building

schools, roads and urban improvement was acknowledged. However, the money available for these aims was clearly inadequate. The federal government had appropriated only \$75 million for the building of roads, for example.

Assessing the results of the conference, the labor press noted that they gave no reason to cheer, nor even any hope for any kind of relief for the unemployed in the near future. The threat of unemployment constantly hung over those working, and as a result in the second half of 1921, wages in many cases were cut from 30 to 45 per cent in comparison with their level in 1920. In July 1921, the Steel Trust announced the cancellation of the eight-hour day on the pretext that workers allegedly preferred a longer day for the sake of getting more pay. The coal mines and railroads also sought to get their workers to agree to wage cuts.

In their pursuit of greater profits, the industrialists widely employed women and children.

Continuing their anti-union policy employers fought to preserve the long-existing open shop system based on individual agreement between capitalist and wage-earner. This system of hiring precluded trade union interference in labor relations and thereby threatened to nullify those few gains which the workers had been able to achieve during the war. And this is just what the National Association of Manufacturers wanted to do.

The Steel Trust companies adopted a resolution at their annual meeting declaring that they were ready to make any sacrifice to win recognition of every American's right to conclude an individual agreement with anyone he wants without outside interference. The president of the Pennsylvania Coke and Coal Company said at a conference of mining company officials that the existence of a miners' union and similar organizations could not be tolerated.

Employers used various methods to achieve their goals. The Associated Building Employers of California, for example, sanctioned the sale of materials only to companies and persons who did not hire union members. Even a strike by construction workers failed to influence the association's position. Other employer associations held conferences in which they discussed reports on hiring practices and the conduct of unions.

Materials on the proceedings of such conferences were printed and distributed throughout the country. Employers were urged to intensify the fight for "industrial freedom". With the aim of suppressing recalcitrant workers, employers made up black lists, and their associations frequently appealed to the courts to issue injunctions against strikes.

In their efforts to split labor organizations, employers continued to set up and encourage company unions, mostly in heavy industry, on the railroads, and in certain consumer goods industries. Hundreds of thousands of workers were members of such organizations. In 1919, there were already 400,000 members in 225 so-called labor councils,<sup>1</sup> where the worker in fact had no real rights.

The A.F.L. and the independent unions, primarily the four Railroad Brotherhoods, continued to hold the leading position in the labor movement; together they accounted for about 90 percent of all organized workers. In response to the anti-union policies of employer associations the A.F.L. called a conference of its unions in Washington in February 1921 to work out countermeasures. A declaration adopted there, however, included attacks on progressive unionists, charging them with "fanaticism" and demanding their expulsion from labor organizations. At the same time, in their actions against big capital Gompers and his associates went no further than making empty declarations of protest. So-called business unionism, or a system of deals between opportunist labor leaders and employers, flourished during that period, doing inevitable damage to the labor movement.

The policy of "class collaboration", intertwined with the practice of business unionism, was given wide publicity at the annual conventions of the A.F.L. At the 41st convention, held in Denver, Colorado, in June 1921, some of the delegates who criticized the Federation leadership were crudely attacked by Gompers and his supporters. The convention turned down both the resolutions to fight against discrimination and unemployment, and the ones calling for economic ties with Soviet Russia and aid to its hungry.

<sup>1</sup> *American Federationist*, April 1921, p. 289.



Moreover, the 42nd convention held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in June 1922 passed a resolution declaring A.F.L. opposition to rendering aid to Soviet Russia. The framers of the resolution tried to justify this stance with false assertions to the effect that the Soviet Government was not the legitimate voice of the Russian people.

Progressive delegates spoke out at that convention in favor of recognizing the Soviet Government and developing trade with Soviet Russia, and denounced the hostile position taken by Gompers and his supporters. Many delegates supported a resolution demanding recognition of Russia and the establishment of commercial relations with it, but it was rejected by the majority.

Speaking against the resolution, Gompers and his supporters asserted that the Soviet Government was attempting to undermine the A.F.L. from within and to subvert democracy in general. This patently unfounded position was frequently proclaimed at A.F.L. conventions as the Federation's political platform.

Several resolutions were submitted to the 42nd convention regarding the merger of individual unions on an industrial basis. However, the Federation leaders succeeded in killing all proposals for any change in structure. This course inevitably led to a wider rift in the labor movement and had an adverse effect on the Federation itself. One indication of decline in the labor movement was a drop in A.F.L. membership. While prior to 1920 union membership was on the increase, from 1921 it showed a steady fall, as illustrated by the following figures (in thousands)<sup>1</sup>:

	1921	1922	1923
A.F.L. Unions	3,967	3,273	2,919
Independent Unions	815	754	703

It should be noted, in addition, that still only an insignificant proportion of American workers were organized, an indication of what a serious obstacle to labor movement progress Gompersism was. There were 20 million industrial workers in the United States in 1923, but only 3.6 million were organized.

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 97.

November 1920 saw the formation of the Trade Union Educational League (T.U.E.L.) as the successor to the left-wing Syndicalist League of North America (1912) and the International Trade Union Educational League (1915). It was founded by William Z. Foster, Jack Johnstone, Joseph Manly, and others, most of whom belonged to a group that in 1917 had initiated a campaign within the A.F.L. which resulted in the unification of workers in the meat-packing industry into a single industrial trade union with 200,000 members. That group, along with other active labor figures who had broken with the erroneous tactics of the I.W.W., joined the Communist Party in 1921.

The T.U.E.L. was a voluntary association of trade union members belonging to labor organizations whose principles and activity were mutually recognized by the League and the labor unions. An example of such organizations were industrial unions. Anyone desiring to become a member of the League had to belong to an organization of this kind, subscribe to the League newspaper, the *Labor Herald*, and declare his acceptance of the basic propositions of the League's program.

Operating funds were raised from subscriptions to the *Labor Herald*, from the sale of two League publications, and from voluntary contributions. The League was headed by a National Committee elected at annual conferences.

The League was active in creating industrial committees in large industries and groups of League supporters in the craft unions to promote its program.

Territorially, the T.U.E.L. organizational structure followed the A.F.L. patterns. It was subdivided according to four large areas: Eastern, Central, and Western states, and Canada. Another subdivision was industrial sections, each of which was headed by an international committee, the latter charged with functions of political education.

The League was an advocate of building trade unions on the industrial principle and eliminating craft barriers among labor organizations. It worked for drawing broad sections of the working class into militant democratic labor unions that would be able to combine economic and political struggle.

The League represented a bloc of left-wing organizations in which the Communists occupied a prominent place. It

cooperated with the Workers Party in its efforts to organize unorganized workers and to achieve U.S. recognition of Soviet Russia. All these questions were reflected in the League's activities in 1922 and 1923.

There had been many errors and weaknesses in the work along these lines in the preceding years. They were particularly noticeable during strike actions by steel and railroad workers, longshoremen, miners and other sections of the working class. But now that the Communists finally united into a single party, they could concentrate on the work in the A.F.L. unions and the Railroad Brotherhoods. In May 1921, the Communist Party altered its tactic with respect to the trade unions. It abandoned the practice of creating parallel organizations, realizing that the old approach would only end up helping to split the movement and isolate progressive leaders from broad sections of organized workers.

But choosing the new way did not mean that the ends were achieved. Great ideological, organizational and financial difficulties lay ahead. In its work to unite all progressive forces, the Party attached no little importance to the T.U.E.L. Although the League had already been in existence for more than a year, it had not been able to do much work along the lines intended. It had to expend a great deal of effort just to strengthen its ranks and overcome the sentiments, still strong in the left wing of the labor movement, favoring dual unionism.

Only by the spring of 1922 did the League succeed in carrying out some measures of an educational nature. Eugene Debs called it "the one rightly directed movement for the industrial unification of the American workers".<sup>1</sup> It took an active part in the strike struggles of construction workers, miners and railway workers (1922), and coal miners (1923). In protest against U.S. Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty's order banning a strike of railroad workers (July 1922), the League launched a campaign calling for a general strike. Gompers admitted having received about 200 resolutions demanding strong union action on a nation-wide scale, and

<sup>1</sup> Quote from Philip S. Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union. A Story of Dramatic Struggles and Achievements*, Newark, 1950, p. 124.

said that never in the history of the labor movement had there been such a widespread sentiment for a general strike.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the T.U.E.L. became a target of persecution by the authorities. Police arrested William Foster and other League leaders in August 1922 in Chicago, where the League's first convention was taking place. The League was also attacked by the trade union bureaucrats led by Gompers, upon whose instructions the more prominent League figures were either removed from their union posts or expelled from the unions.

A marked decline in the revolutionary movement began in 1921 throughout the capitalist world, and the United States was no exception. Employers took advantage of the economic crisis to beef up their attacks against the labor unions. Organized workers fought back with a series of strikes. However, their struggle lacked the intensity it had between 1918 and 1920. This was evidenced by the figures on the number of strikes and workers involved.

Table 2

Year	Total disputes reported	Labor disputes and workers involved		Average number of workers involved per strike
		Disputes in which number of workers was given	Total number of workers involved (thousand)	
1921	2,385	1,785	1,099	616
1922	1,083	865	1,608	1,859
1923	1,506	1,132	744	659

While from the end of 1918 to the second half of 1920 strikes were basically of offensive nature, in the second half of 1920, in view of the economic crisis and high unemployment, the workers had to concentrate on defending their previous gains. Strikes involved primarily organized workers, with many strikes arising spontaneously without the sanction of the A.F.L. Executive Council, and sometimes even contrary to its decisions. However, there were also some strikes involving unorganized workers. The miners, railroad workers and textile



workers were in the forefront of the strike movement in those years, with their strikes involving about a million workers. In 1922, for example, over 600,000 miners took part in strikes.

As a result of the strikes, coal production dropped from 89.6 million tons of anthracite and 568.7 million tons of bituminous coal in 1920 to 54.7 million and 422.3 million tons respectively in 1922. During some of the strikes, clashes with police occurred.

The United Mine Workers' two-year contract was due to expire in April 1922. In the meantime, although the cost of living had gone up, the mineowners were trying to cut wage rates and increase production quotas. In response, the more than 450,000-strong army of miners set forth new demands and on April 1, 1922, refused to go down into the mines. They demanded a five-day week and a dollar-a-day wage increase. When the courts intervened and declared the strike illegal, the miners did not waver. They continued their struggle courageously for five months.

The Harding Administration first took the position of neutrality. At first it thought that the dispute would be settled at a conference of representatives of the mineowners and the trade union. However, the strike spread to railroad workshops. On July 1, 1922, President Harding declared that strikes in such sectors of the economy "threaten the national welfare" and the government would not hesitate taking decisive measures, including interference through the courts. In a number of areas, the mineowners had striking miners evicted from their homes.

Due to pressure exerted by the mineowners, the government and certain labor leaders, the strike ended on terms unfavorable to the miners. The coal barons did not hasten to conclude new collective agreements, and the contract finally signed in March 1923 was essentially a continuation of the previous contract, whose terms had long become outdated.

Another important event in the U.S. labor movement in the early 1920s was a massive railroad workers' strike. In July 1922, 400,000 workers struck in protest against new wage cuts affecting primarily shop workers, office employees and signal men. Before long, workers in other railroad occupations

joined the strikers, bringing the total number on strike to 500,000.<sup>1</sup>

The strike alarmed the employers and the government. Threats that force would be used against the workers appeared in the press. The railroad labor dispute administration formed of representatives of the companies, the unions and the public in 1920, approved the actions of the railroad companies, which brought in strikebreakers under police and National Guard protection. On July 11, President Harding issued a statement in which he obliged the railroad companies to guarantee the uninterrupted movement of trains. He also approved the use of strikebreakers. What amounted to martial law was declared in almost every large railroad center. Thousands of policemen were mobilized to protect the strikebreakers.

In a message to Congress on August 18, 1922, President Harding threatened to use "all the power of the government to maintain transportation and sustain the right of men to work".<sup>2</sup> He placed the responsibility for the strike on railroad workers' unions. Attorney General Daugherty also threatened to use the powers given him by the government to prevent the unions from destroying the system of free employment. In the history of every nation, Daugherty explained, there are moments when it should be reminded that it has a government. No unions, he said, had the right to dictate their will to the United States. If trade unions wanted to dictate their will to the government, if they wanted to govern the American people, then the government would destroy the trade unions.

And indeed, at the height of the strike, the government helped in breaking the resistance of the railroad workers. On September 13, 1922, the Brotherhoods signed a contract under which lower wage rates were introduced. However, only half of the strikers returned to work on these terms. Another 200,000 continued, unsuccessfully, to strike. Craft unionism had a negative effect on the outcome of the struggle. Out of 16 union organizations with a total of 1.5 million members, only four unions (of the railroad workshops) struck simultaneously,

<sup>1</sup> See, Anthony Bimba, *History of the American Working Class*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Record*, July 31 to August 28, 1922, Washington, 1922, p. 11540.

the remainder striking at different times, thus showing inadequate unity among the railroad workers.

The strike ended in a serious defeat for the workers. They made only insignificant gains. Contracts were concluded with a number of companies and a conciliation commission was set up, something the owners had not agreed to earlier. The unions were weakened for a long time to come and some ceased to exist, being replaced by company unions. All this set the stage for capitulation by the Railroad Brotherhoods.

Among the other major labor actions in those years was the textile workers' strike in New England, which began on January 23, 1922, in Rhode Island and ended November 20, in New Hampshire. It too was precipitated by a 10 to 20 percent reduction in wages and increased hours. Sixty-six thousand workers at 65 mills in the northeastern states were involved.

As in many other strikes, the courts interfered, and local authorities brought in police and arbitration commissions. It was no wonder that, on the whole, this strike, too, ended unfavorably for the workers: although the wage cuts were cancelled, they did not win a reduction of the workweek from 54 to 48 hours (Rhode Island and New Hampshire laws permitted a 54-hour workweek for women and adolescents). After months of hard and stubborn struggle the strikers finally return to work.

Thus, the period 1921-1923 was characterized by serious conflicts in industry. Workers had to wage largely defensive battles, frequently experiencing the bitterness of defeat.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### THE MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION (1918-23)

After World War I, along with the strengthening of the left wing of the socialist movement and the emergence of the Communist Party, the United States saw the development of a broad democratic, anti-monopoly movement involving industrial workers, farmers and intellectuals. The economic and political situation in the country in the early postwar years engendered widespread popular disappointment with the Democratic and Republican parties. This led to a movement of progressive workers and farmers for limiting the power of the monopolies, for independent political action and the creation of an independent political party of the working people.

The movement for organizing an independent labor party began in the summer of 1918 in the northeastern part of the country, where in the course of a strike, labor unions in Bridgeport, Connecticut, sparked the creation of the first local labor party. After that, the movement spread spontaneously to other industrial areas.

In November 1918, the President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, John Fitzpatrick, and the Federation's Secretary, Edward Nockels, called on workers to support the movement for a mass labor party, and worked out what came to be called



the Chicago Program.<sup>1</sup> The Program was anti-monopoly in character. High on the list of its demands were the nationalization of the railroads, steamship companies, natural resources, water power, the telephone and telegraph companies and other public utilities, and the introduction of democratic worker control in all other areas of industry and commerce, with the aim of destroying the economic power of the big monopolies.

The Program contained a series of demands aimed at protecting the interests of the working class. It called for an eight-hour day and 44-hour week, a minimum wage, recognition of the workers' unconditional right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining, the introduction of a government social security system, the organization of public works for the unemployed, etc. The Program also called for strict observance of freedom of speech, the press and assembly, and the release of political prisoners. Finally, the leaders of the Federation sought to oppose the democratic platform of the progressive labor movement to the "peace" program which the Wilson Administration was promoting in 1918. It was no accident that the Chicago Program consisted of 14 points, and that in counterbalance to Wilson's League of Nations slogan it proposed the creation of a League of Workers of all nations for the purpose of destroying autocracy and militarism and achieving universal disarmament.

It was on the basis of this program that a movement for organizing independent labor parties was launched. Such parties were created in Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Portland and other large industrial centers, and later sprang up on the state level (Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, Kansas, Indiana, Connecticut, Utah). The new parties took part in election campaigns, supported the strike struggle, and came out for a halt to the armed anti-Soviet intervention and recognition of the Soviet Republic. True, all of these organizations were still very small, bringing together those rank-and-file union members who had already begun to understand the essence of the Gompersite policy of "non-

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1919-1920*, Vol. 3, New York, pp. 200-01.

partisanship" and were ready to abandon it. The bulk of the working class as yet remained little affected by this new movement. The right-wing A.F.L. leaders put up a stubborn fight against it. On the other hand, the leadership of the Socialist Party, taking a sectarian position, refused to support the movement on the grounds that it did not have a socialist program. But despite all these unfavorable circumstances, the movement of progressive American workers for a break with the two-party system gradually grew in strength.

In November 1919, a national labor convention in Chicago proclaimed the founding of a National Labor Party, uniting all the labor parties that had already been organized heretofore in various cities, counties and states. The convention adopted a program in the form of a Declaration of Principles, underlying which were the major points of the Chicago Federation of Labor platform. However, many of those points were spelled out much more precisely. For example, the Declaration stated the need to nationalize the basic industries, transport and the entire banking system.

The new Party insisted on an immediate halt to the intervention against Soviet Russia, supported the principle of self-determination for all nations, and came out with a call for Negro civil rights. The Declaration also called for democratizing the American political system, revising the Constitution, granting the people the right of legislative initiative and the right to recall elected congressmen, substantially reducing the prerogatives of the Supreme Court, which would include abrogation of its right to declare laws unconstitutional.

Thus, the Declaration of Principles testified to a further radicalization of the progressive part of the workers and a growth of their class consciousness. True, the program also reflected certain reformist illusions; it was not yet anti-capitalist. But with all its shortcomings, the fact that the progressive elements of the trade union movement in the ranks of the National Labor Party had united around it was a step forward in the development of the U.S. labor movement. The program created the ideological basis for an anti-monopoly struggle.

In addition to this left wing, more moderate forces took part in the movement for independent political action, trying to

carry out similar actions within the framework of the existing political parties. This tactical line found support among the Railroad Brotherhoods, farmers and progressive intellectuals.

An example of this line was the activity of certain radical farmer organizations, particularly that of the Non-Partisan League, which was founded in 1915 in North Dakota. It was led by Arthur Townley, a local farmer who was soon to become a prominent figure in the farmers' movement.

From the outset, the League fought for socialization of grain elevators, mills and railroads, a reduction of interest rates on debts, and an increase in taxes on big capital. It took a radical position with regard to the political dominance of big capital. If the farmers in North Dakota constituted 83 percent of the population, the League leaders said, why should they not control 83 percent of the government.<sup>1</sup>

While they advocated independent political action by working people, the leaders of the Non-Partisan League did not, however, consider a third party necessary. They directed their efforts toward getting their own candidates nominated to run on the Republican or Democratic Party tickets and campaigned for their election. Employing these tactics, the League in 1916 had its representative, the farmer Lynn Frazier, who ran on the Republican ticket, elected governor of North Dakota. In addition, it filled nearly all positions in the state administration and won 85 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of North Dakota.

In 1917 and 1918, the League carried out a number of measures in the farmers' interests. For example, big companies were subjected to somewhat heavier taxation, while taxes paid by farmers were reduced. A special state inspectorate was established, with authority to oversee operations on grain elevators. To be sure, when the new public officials of North Dakota attempted to move from individual measures to implementing the entire program, they encountered resistance

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West 1900-1939*, Madison, 1951, p. 160.

from big capital. The press lashed out against the League's basic proposals, calling its program ruinous, anarchistic and socialistic and picturing a League victory at the polls as the establishment of an "agrarian dictatorship".<sup>1</sup> The Senate of North Dakota, in which the League did not have a majority at the time, categorically rejected its basic proposals. However, that setback did not discourage the farmers. On the contrary, they united more closely around the League, preparing for new decisive battles.

The first successes of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota made a big impression on farmers in other areas. The League organizations gradually began to spread to all the neighboring states. In 1917, the National Non-Partisan League was founded, setting itself the task of uniting the efforts of all the local League organizations. By the end of 1918, the national organization had 188,365 members.<sup>2</sup>

Characteristically, the idea of farmer-worker unity in the struggle against the economic and political dominance of the monopolies was widespread among League members. Arthur Townley said in one of his speeches in 1917: "The farmers control 35 percent of the vote of this country; labor controls about 27 percent; a combination of these two elements would make itself felt throughout the nation."<sup>3</sup>

A new and much more radical program was adopted at the League's national convention in December 1918. Influenced by the Chicago Federation of Labor's Program, it contained demands for nationalizing natural resources, public utilities, all means of transportation, and all other undertakings which in their nature had to be great private monopolies. In the 1918 election, the Non-Partisan League scored a big victory in North Dakota. This time it won a majority in both houses of the legislature, got its candidates elected to the Supreme Court of North Dakota, gained control of the entire state administra-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170; R. L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire, The Non-Partisan League, 1915-1922*, Minneapolis, 1955, pp. 60-61; Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics. A Historical Study of Its Origins and Development 1870-1950*, East Lansing, Michigan, 1951, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928*, New York, 1961, p. 373.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 180.



tion, and elected two of its candidates to the U.S. Congress. The League organizations in other states, such as Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana and Idaho, also scored their first successes in the 1918 elections.

With a smashing victory at the polls behind it, the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota began in 1919 to implement a series of reforms under its industrial program. At the League's proposal, the legislature approved the establishment of a state-owned Bank of North Dakota, whose function was to finance all sectors of the economy. After that it passed such measures as a project for building state-owned grain elevators and mills, a plan to build inexpensive homes for farmers and workers, a progressive income tax, a reduction of railroad freight rates and interest rates on debts, a limited workday for women, and a workers' disability compensation system. An industrial commission, consisting of the Governor, the Attorney General and the head of the Department of Labor and Agriculture was set up to oversee the fulfillment of this program.

The workers and farmers of North Dakota welcomed the industrial program. Representatives of big business, however, seeing in the actions of the League a serious threat to their profits, began a campaign against it. The monopolies boycotted the operations of the new bank and impeded the building of public elevators and mills. The press raised the bogey of a "Red menace", calling the League leaders radical socialist followers of Lenin. One after another, legal actions of every kind were brought against League officials. But the campaign failed to achieve its goals. In 1920, the League's membership reached 235,000.<sup>1</sup> The measures carried out in North Dakota were approved by the labor federations of Minnesota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Idaho and a number of other states.

Among the organizations associated with the moderate wing of the democratic movement in that period were 16 railroad workers' unions with a total membership of 1.5 million. Like the Non-Partisan League, the Railroad Brotherhoods objected to the idea of creating an independent labor party and reduced the problem of independent political action of the unions

<sup>1</sup> A. A. Bruce, *Non-Partisan League*, New York, 1921, p. 8.

merely to getting their own favorites to run for office on the Republican or Democratic Party tickets and campaigning for their election.

On certain questions the railroad unions acted in concert with the left wing of the American Federation of Labor. They endorsed the plan for government ownership of railroads devised by Glen Plumb, then the chief legal advisor for the railroad workers' unions. In 1919, they set up the Social League of Struggle for the Plumb Plan, which was led by Warren Stone, head of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

Big capital made a strong stand against all proposals to nationalize the railroads, calling the Plumb Plan a "socialist", "Bolshevist" plan, which violated the principles of "Americanism". In counterbalance to these proposals the Esch-Cummins transportation bill was introduced in Congress providing for the return of the railroads to their former owners. The bill became law in February 1920. Nonetheless, the campaign in favor of nationalizing the railroads continued even after Congress rejected the Plumb Plan.

The railroad union leaders restricted their practical work exclusively to that campaign. They kept aloof of the drive for broad democratic reforms as envisaged in the Chicago Federation of Labor's Program and the National Labor Party's Declaration of Principles, fearing what they felt was an excessive growth of radical sentiments in labor's ranks.

Similar contradictions were typical of progressive petty-bourgeois and liberal-bourgeois groups. Among these the most active role was played during those years by the Committee of Forty-Eight, an organization formed in 1919 primarily by intellectuals who were former members of the Progressive Party that had broken up after the 1912 elections. Heading the Committee was J. A. H. Hopkins, an insurance agent from New Jersey, who was active in the Progressive movement. The views of the organization were expressed by the popular liberal magazines *Nation* and *New Republic*.

A no less important role was played by a group of Progressive Republicans headed by Senator Robert M. La Follette, Sr., who, from the turn of the century, was one of the leaders of the left wing of the Republican Party. Over his long

career he took part in many democratic movements. In his speeches and public appearances, as well as in *La Follette's Magazine*, which he published since 1909, he promoted a program of democratic, anti-monopoly reforms. This program found support among other representatives of bourgeois liberalism, among whom were such prominent political figures, scholars and writers as Senator George W. Norris, John R. Commons and William Allen White.

All these organizations and groups of Progressives expressed the interests of the middle strata. According to the 1920 census, of the 42 million people constituting the economically active population, about 18 million were small businessmen, merchants, farmers, professional men, administrative personnel, etc.<sup>1</sup> Objectively, these strata could become important allies of the working class in the struggle against the monopolies, and it was no accident that the Committee of Forty-Eight included in its program such important demands as those for nationalizing the railroads, natural resources and basic public utilities, raising taxes on great fortunes, democratizing the American political system, etc.

Of course, the middle strata brought many petty-bourgeois illusions and prejudices into the general democratic movement. They reflected inevitable vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie as it tends to support the working class and yet fears its revolutionary spirit. Like the leadership of the railroad workers' unions, the greater part of the Progressives rejected the idea of creating a third party and sought only to support Progressive candidates within the framework of the two main parties. Nonetheless, despite its limitations, the Progressive movement in 1918-1920 became an important factor in the political life of the country.

Thus the democratic movement which arose in the United States after World War I was not homogeneous. Groups and trends that became associated with it differed in the degree of radicalism of their views, the breadth and depth of their political platforms, and the methods of political action they chose. All these groups, however, shared one—and a most

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 74-77.

important—thing in common, and that was their anti-monopoly thrust. This meant that objective prerequisites already existed for their unification in the struggle against the financial oligarchy.

The formation in November 1919 of the National Labor Party and the adoption of its Declaration of Principles served as the starting point for practical actions by progressive workers to unite the forces of democracy. The National Labor Party and its state organizations launched a campaign for unity. Its appeals found response among the workers and farmers. New labor parties emerged in Iowa, Nebraska and Wyoming. In Minnesota, with the sanction of the state Federation of Labor, a Labor's Non-Partisan League was founded in 1919 to become a kind of urban branch of the local organization of the Farmers Non-Partisan League. The "Farmer-Labor Party" slogan found supporters among some leading figures in the National Non-Partisan League who objected to its former tactical line as proposed by Arthur Townley.

In early 1920, the National Labor Party began preparations for its second convention. It hoped to achieve unity with a number of radical farmers' organizations and to proclaim the establishment of a Farmer-Labor Party.

During the 1920 election campaign, the Committee of Forty-Eight issued a statement that implied a break with the two basic political parties. The statement said that both of the old parties were simply rival servants of the big monopolies, that they had broken with democratic principles and had embarked on an alliance with reaction. No matter which of the two parties won the election, it said, the people would get nothing.

The Committee of Forty-Eight did not favor the immediate formation of a third party, however, but merely advocated counterbalancing the two old parties by forming a national coalition of progressive forces in which, under the leadership of Progressives like La Follette, all anti-monopoly elements in the society could be united.

The second convention of the National Labor Party took place July 11-13, 1920, in Chicago. The local unionists who



made up its left wing felt that all democratic forces should be united in a national Farmer-Labor Party. In other words, the left wing wanted to see a break with the bourgeois parties and the formation of an independent political party of working people.

Many of the delegates to the convention, however, represented the more moderate trends in the anti-monopoly movement. Above all, these included delegates from the Non-Partisan League and the farmer organizations connected with it, most of whom did not endorse the idea of creating a Farmer-Labor Party, but continued to support the principle of political action within the framework of the two basic parties. But the position of the more radical workers prevailed, and the majority at the Chicago convention voted in favor of a Labor-Farmer Party.

The Committee of Forty-Eight was holding its own convention at exactly the same time, and there, too, a course toward the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party was approved. But when it became clear that some of the leaders were against it, rank-and-file delegates to the Committee of Forty-Eight convention went to the Chicago convention hall and joined the newly organized Farmer-Labor Party (F.L.P.).

The coming together in the ranks of the F.L.P. of such diverse political groups as the National Labor Party, on the one hand, and members of the Committee of Forty-Eight, on the other, made inevitable the ideological struggle that ensued at the Chicago convention in drawing up the new Party's platform. The Committee of Forty-Eight people argued against the most important points in the N.L.P.'s Declaration of Principles. They felt, for example, that the demand for the nationalization of key industries was too radical. For the sake of preserving unity, representatives of the National Labor Party agreed to certain concessions. While declaring the necessity of establishing public ownership of the major public utilities (railroads, coal mines, hydroelectric power plants, grain elevators, telegraph and telephone lines, etc.) the F.L.P. platform did not contain a general demand for the nationalization of the basic industries. Instead, it only advanced slogans calling for democratic control over industry and the right

of workers to an appropriate share in industrial management.<sup>1</sup>

Even with the concessions made, the F.L.P. platform reflected considerable development in the democratic movement. Its basic points echoed many of the propositions of the N.L.P.'s Declaration of Principles, including such important demands as recognition of Soviet Russia and cessation of the intervention against it, recognition of the principle of self-determination for all oppressed nations, and democratization of the American political system. Despite objections coming from some liberals, the platform included a special point on equal rights for Negroes. Thus, the ideological struggle between the representatives of the N.L.P. and the Progressives from the Committee of Forty-Eight ended in a victory for the more radical elements in the labor movement.

The F.L.P. convention had another important problem to solve: to nominate a presidential candidate for the forthcoming elections in November 1920. The liberals from the Committee of Forty-Eight and some farmer delegates urged the convention to ask Senator La Follette to lead the F.L.P. ticket. The majority, however, found La Follette's candidacy unacceptable. And La Follette himself showed no desire to head the third party. Its platform was too radical for him. The person chosen was Parley Parker Christensen, a lawyer from the State of Utah who was known to progressive labor union activists and the Committee of Forty-Eight rank and file as a man with radical convictions.

From the outset of the election campaign, the F.L.P. encountered serious difficulties. For one thing, it did not have enough money, and also lacked strong local organizations in many parts of the country. As a consequence, the new Party was able to get on the ballot in only 19 states.

Voter response also proved to be weaker than expected: Christensen received only 265,000 votes.

Nonetheless, the results of the 1920 elections testified to a certain growth in the popularity of the slogan for independent political action. This was indicated particularly by the successes of the Non-Partisan League, which backed its own candidates

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1923-1924*, Vol. 5, New York, p. 144.

in local elections in nine states and won more than 1.2 million votes.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, practical experience was prompting progressive workers and farmers toward a break with the two-party system and the creation of a third party. That is why, despite its small size and rather modest results in the 1920 elections, the emergence of the F.L.P. was an important event.

It was inevitable, however, that the activity of the F.L.P. would be affected by the ideological weakness of the American working class. The Socialist Party of America and the sectarian Socialist Labor Party refused to support the burgeoning democratic movement. Both parties chose their own candidates for the 1920 elections, thereby locking themselves up within a narrow framework and isolating their supporters from the newly emerged anti-monopoly movement. This applied particularly to the Socialist Party, whose candidate, Eugene Debs, received 920,000 votes in 1920.

On the other hand, both of the newly founded Communist Parties, unable as yet to gather strength, were immediately subjected to repression and forced underground. This intensified the sectarian tendencies which had arisen in the U.S. communist movement at that time. Failing to take into account the specific situation of the period and overestimating the revolutionary possibilities of the American proletariat, both Communist Parties set as their immediate task the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and rejected the necessity of fighting for partial reforms.<sup>2</sup> In line with this, the Communists refused to support any democratic movements that were not anti-capitalist.

The program of the Communist Party of America, for example, said: "The Communist Party, accordingly, in campaigns and elections, and in all its other activities, shall not cooperate with groups or parties not committed to the revolutionary class struggle such as the Socialist Party, Labor Party, Non-Partisan League..., etc."<sup>3</sup> This had an adverse impact on the development of the democratic anti-monopoly

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1923-1924*, Vol. 5, 142.

<sup>2</sup> See, William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1919-1920*, Vol. 3, New York, p. 418.

movement. Hence, the establishment of close ties between the proletarian vanguard and the masses of workers and farmers awakening to simple forms of independent political action became an urgent problem for the American labor movement.

The economic crisis of 1920-1921 introduced some important changes into the political situation in the United States. Neither Wilson's Democratic Administration nor Harding's Republican Administration which replaced it in early 1921, had done anything to even slightly alleviate the situation for the working people. That is why the gravitation of workers and farmers toward independent political action increased.

As before, the initiative came from progressive labor circles. After the 1920 election, the F.L.P. and the labor unions associated with it continued a campaign to gain popular support for their program. Of great significance in this respect was the establishment of ties between the F.L.P. and the Trade Union Educational League. The slogan calling for establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with Soviet Russia occupied an important place in the left-wing campaign. In 1921, an F.L.P. delegation paid an extended visit to the Soviet Republic.

The F.L.P.'s vigorous work had a positive effect on the activity of various labor and farmer organizations. In October 1921, a United Mine Workers' convention adopted a resolution calling on workers and farmers to refuse to support Democrats and Republicans and to unite into a new political party. The convention urged the executive council of the A.F.L. to call a conference of workers' and farmers' organizations for the purpose of forming a popular political coalition and working out its program.

In early 1921, a Farmer-Labor Legislative Committee was set up in Iowa to protect the interests and satisfy the needs of the popular masses. In September of that year, a Farmer-Labor League of Reconstruction sprang up in Oklahoma, with a program modelled after that of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota. The goal of the Farmer-Labor League of Reconstruction was to unite farm workers into a close-knit alliance with their industrial brothers in the cities for joint political action. Similar trends, although not formed organizationally, existed in other parts of the country.



All this meant that under the impact of growing popular discontent the progressive movement took on broader dimensions in 1920-1921. Millions of workers and farmers wanted changes. Though they still had only a very vague idea of how this could be achieved, they gradually came to realize that their number one enemy was big business. The growth of the working people's political consciousness caused alarm in the ruling circles of America.

The first attempt to unify all democratic forces of the nation at this new stage was made at the beginning of 1922. This time by Progressive leaders.

A special committee made up of representatives of the 16 railroad workers' unions and certain liberal groups issued an address to all worker, farmer and other democratic organizations of the United States proposing a national convention to join forces for independent political action.

Responses to the call came from across the country. Taking this into account the left wing of the progressive movement associated with the F.L.P. decided to support the move of the Railroad Brotherhoods. Of course, neither the platform of the Progressives nor the methods for political action they proposed could fully satisfy the radical workers and farmers. But both the platform and the methods corresponded to the level of political consciousness among the bulk of the movement. Ignoring this would have meant losing touch with the masses. On the other hand, however limited the Progressive program was, there was no doubt about its anti-monopoly character.

The first national convention of the basic groups of the movement took place February 20-21, 1922, in Chicago, with about 250 delegates in attendance. Labor unions were especially widely represented, with delegates coming from the Railroad Brotherhoods, the United Mine Workers Union, unions of workers in consumer foods industries, and from the federations of labor of eight states (Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Montana, Wyoming, and West Virginia). The Socialist Party sent a big delegation, and leaders of the F.L.P. and its state organizations also took an active part. Farmers who did not share the radical views of the F.L.P. were represented by delegates from the Non-Partisan League. The

organizations sending delegates had an aggregate membership of about 2.5 million. All this indicated the representative nature of the Chicago convention of 1922.

The key questions at the convention stirred relatively little controversy. After a brief debate the delegates approved an Address to the American People in which they expressed their protest against the dominance of the large monopolies and condemned the anti-popular policy of the government.<sup>1</sup>

The anti-monopoly drive and criticism of government policies were among the strong aspects of the convention's decisions. However, reformist views and illusions of parliamentarism prevailed in the speeches of many delegates, including those of the left wing. Essentially, the attention of the Convention was focussed on debate on how to make effective use of the forthcoming election campaign later that year. In this, the leaders of the railroad unions did everything possible to re-channel the momentum for independent political action into support of individual progressive candidates in the two parties.

Proposals to create an independent working-class party were made at the convention, but neither the Socialists nor the F.L.P. representatives were able to muster enough support for the idea. In the end a compromise resolution was adopted: every organization should act at its own discretion, that is, either work for the election of progressive candidates within the old parties, or move away from the two-party system and nominate its own candidates. It was contemplated that the question of creating a national third party would be taken up after the elections, at the close of 1922.

With the aim of uniting the democratic forces of the country, the convention decided to form a national federation of the organizations represented at Chicago. The new body was called the Conference for Progressive Political Action (C.P.P.A.), and William H. Johnston, president of the railway machinists, was chosen to head its national committee.

The 1922 Chicago convention and the establishment of the C.P.P.A. constituted an important step forward in the develop-

<sup>1</sup> See, *The New York Times*, February 22, 1922.

ment of the democratic movement. For the first time since the upsurge of the progressive movement in 1918, the major forces opposed to the big monopolies united on the national level. However, this amalgamation was still unstable, and the bulk of its membership was under the influence of the two-party system.

In the meantime, other developments in the early twenties held out the promise that the progressive forces would be able to strengthen their positions. Chief among these was the merger in 1921 of all communist forces into the Workers Party of America and the adoption of a new Party program, which was the first step toward overcoming sectarianism, enabling Communists to participate more effectively in the day-to-day struggle of the working people.

The beneficial results of the new communist tactical line were very rapidly felt. In May 1922, the leadership of the Workers Party decided to establish contact with the F.L.P. and together with it to campaign for the formation of a labor party which would include trade unions and mass organizations of farmers and agricultural workers. Progressive trade union activists responded to the initiative of the Communists with enthusiasm. The second convention of the F.L.P. which took place in May 1922 in Chicago, worked out plans for participation in the upcoming elections. The ties established between the Communists and the left forces of the trade union movement created important preconditions for the further development of the democratic movement.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the railroad unions who headed the C.P.P.A. also began active preparations for the elections. In most cases they succeeded in orienting the campaigns of democratic labor and farmer organizations along the old line of supporting progressive candidates of the two major parties. However, in some parts of the country the 1922 elections were marked by a vigorous movement in favor of a third party.

A typical example of this trend was Minnesota. In the summer of 1922, the Farmers Non-Partisan League and the Labor's Non-Partisan League decided to join forces as an independent political party called the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. The new Party nominated its own candidates for the elections. An especially hard election battle was fought over

the Senate seat held until then by Frank Kellogg, a prominent Republican leader. The Farmer-Labor candidate was Henrik Shipstead, a local progressive. Despite the fact that Kellogg was backed by many eminent Republicans including Vice-President Coolidge the new Party's candidate, with the help of the trade unions and farmer organizations, won the election, receiving 83,000 votes more than his Republican opponent, to become the first third Party representative in the U.S. Senate since the days of Populism.<sup>1</sup> The new Party also sent two of its endorsees to the House of Representatives and won a majority of seats in the Minnesota legislature. Although the Republicans, by a small majority, retained the governorship, the 1922 elections marked an important victory for the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, ushering in a period of its control of the state.

F.L.P. organizations conducted independent election campaigns in several other states as well (South Dakota, Idaho, Washington), but with considerably less success than in Minnesota.

The 1922 elections demonstrated a growing eagerness on the part of the masses for independent political action. It is important to note that more and more often voters opposed the official Republican or Democratic nominees and sought to have these parties nominate other candidates who declared their support of the C.P.P.A. platform. Significant in this respect were the actions of the C.P.P.A. in Wisconsin. With the help of the labor unions, the Non-Partisan League and other democratic organizations, the Progressives of Wisconsin gained control of the entire administration and most of the seats in the state legislature, and La Follette was elected to a fourth term in the U.S. Senate by a sweeping majority. A number of Progressive candidates also won in Iowa, North Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, Pennsylvania and some other states.

An important result of the 1922 elections was the fact that oppositional sentiments and the movement for independent political action now became typical not only for the midwestern and part of the northeastern states but also for some parts of

<sup>1</sup> *The New Republic*, January 3, 1923, pp. 146-48.



the country that had previously been considered a bulwark of conservatism. For example, in Oklahoma, the Farmer-Labor League of Reconstruction joined with the C.P.P.A. in 1922 and put up its own gubernatorial candidate, Jack Walton, the mayor of Oklahoma City and member of the railroad conductors union. His candidacy was endorsed by the local federation of labor and the Oklahoma Farmer Union.

After winning in the primaries and becoming the Democratic Party candidate for governor, Walton travelled throughout the state making speeches in which he came out against the big monopolies and promised to defend the interests of the people. Not surprisingly, conservative Democrats and Republicans attacked Walton, calling his program revolutionary. In November 1922, Walton was elected Governor of Oklahoma by an overwhelming majority.

The Southern Dixiecrats regarded such election results as dangerous, although the tendency appearing in Oklahoma was not the rule for the South, but an exception.

The Progressives evaluated the results of the 1922 elections as their victory. However, the leadership of the railroad unions and moderate-liberal progressive groups felt that such an outcome also posed a serious threat. They were afraid that the new democratic movement would get out of hand, in which case they might very soon have to face the prospect of the formation of a national third party. Senator William Borah made direct reference to this possibility when, in one of his campaign speeches, he said that if the Republican Party did not drastically change its program, a broad movement for a third party would develop in 1924.

The Progressives set about preventing such a threat and keeping the popular movement under their control. At Senator La Follette's initiative a conference of Progressive congressmen was held in December 1922, in Washington, D. C. Its participants, among whom were 13 Senators and more than 20 Representatives, primarily from the Republican Party, declared themselves to be the "Progressive bloc" and proceeded to work out a legislative program. Central in that program were measures aimed at democratizing the American political system. It also included a number of economic measures for the benefit of the popular masses. La Follette and

his followers tried to persuade the people that a third party was not needed. They proposed using the first Progressive victory in the 1922 elections as a starting point for a fight to oust reactionaries from the Republican Party machine.

While the National Committee of the C.P.P.A. gave its full support to the program and tactics of the liberals, the Chicago Federation of Labor and the F.L.P. intensified their efforts to bring about the formation of an independent labor party. The idea of a third party also found support among the Socialists, and the movement for it grew in big labor unions like the United Mine Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, the Workers Party also decided to send delegates to the next regular session of the C.P.P.A.

The second convention of the C.P.P.A., held December 11-12, 1922, in Cleveland, showed that the number of participants in the movement was growing. The delegates attending represented organizations with an aggregate membership of no less than three million. By the end of 1922, local branches of the C.P.P.A. already existed in 32 states. However, lack of unity among the different groups was in evidence from the outset.

Differences arose as soon as the report of the credentials committee was read. While passing the main body of delegates, the committee refused to do so with respect to the delegates from the Workers Party, contending that the communist program conflicted with the goals of the general democratic movement. On behalf of the Workers Party delegation, Charles Ruthenberg categorically protested the decision and denounced it as an attempt to weaken the left forces. The Communists were supported by the Chicago Federation of Labor and the F.L.P., who demanded that the Workers Party delegates be seated.

The leaders of the Railroad Brotherhoods responded with fierce anti-communist attacks. They called the program of the Workers Party "un-American" and on that basis tried to justify the credentials committee's decision. That decision was also supported by the Socialists, although they said that they disagreed with the charge of un-Americanism. The campaign

against the Communists influenced many of the delegates, with the result that the Workers Party delegates were not admitted.

An even more acute struggle developed during the debate on methods of political action. In his report on the work accomplished between February and December 1922, William Johnston, president of the C.P.P.A. National Committee, focussed attention on the efforts of progressives to work within the old parties and completely ignored the movement for a third party.

Representatives of the Non-Partisan League and the moderate-liberal groups, as well as delegates from the Socialist Party which considered the creation of a third party premature, joined the Railroad Brotherhoods speaking in favor of continuing the C.P.P.A. non-partisan policy.

The left-wing delegates turned out to be in the minority. The Cleveland convention rejected the proposal to form a new political party, bringing profound disappointment to the radical union activists.

The left-wing delegates were fully justified in their criticism of the conference decisions, but in their assessments they ignored certain positive factors.

The convention reflected a definite ideological growth in the movement. The new C.P.P.A. platform adopted there outlined a program of reforms to curb the power of the monopolies and democratize the nation's political system. It made such important demands as public ownership of the railroads, public control over the coal mines and water power, higher taxes on big incomes and re-establishment of the excess profits tax, direct presidential and vice-presidential elections, limitation of the powers of the U.S. Supreme Court, release of political prisoners, guaranteed civil rights, etc.

A few days after the close of the convention, however, the Chicago Federation of Labor and the F.L.P. officially announced their withdrawal from the C.P.P.A., a move that was to put the vanguard of the movement out of touch with the mass of its participants. This helped the conservative union leaders and the liberal Progressives keep masses of workers and farmers under their influence.

Thus, the amalgamation of the nation's democratic forces within the framework of the C.P.P.A. achieved in early 1922

turned out to be very unstable and short-lived. By repudiating the plan to form an independent labor party, the leaders of the Railroad Brotherhoods and the moderate wing of the C.P.P.A. which they headed alienated themselves from the progressive sections of the working class comprising the left wing of the organization. The result was a split in the movement in late 1922. The left forces now tried to act independently.

The year 1923 was marked by an extension of the democratic movement to new social strata as broad sections of the working class, farmers, and urban petty and middle bourgeoisie realized that they were getting no help from the Harding Administration. Popular indignation further increased when in 1923 a disgraceful picture of corruption in the highest echelons of the government was made public.

Meanwhile, after the Cleveland convention of 1922, the practical work of the C.P.P.A. came to a virtual halt. The Railroad Brotherhoods intended to discuss plans for further activity only when the 1924 election campaign got under way. The leadership of the C.P.P.A. thereby forced its local organizations into a position of passive waiting.

The general tactics of Progressive groups also remained unchanged in 1923. These groups made no big secret of their plans. In late July 1923, La Follette declared that the formation of a third party would become inevitable only if the Republicans and the Democrats nominated reactionary candidates for the upcoming elections, but if the candidate from at least one of the two existing political parties was a liberal, then a third party would not be needed.<sup>1</sup>

As before, the C.P.P.A. leadership unconditionally endorsed the tactical line of the liberals and tried to impose it on all their local organizations. When in July a conference of democratic organizations of the state of New York convened in Albany, the leaders of the railroad unions made every effort, including rough pressure on the delegates, to restrict the proceedings to mere approval of the former non-partisan methods of political struggle. Before the Socialist delegation and a group representing the American Labor Party of New York, who

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, July 28, 1923, p. 1.



advocated more radical forms of political action, even had a chance to speak, a motion was carried to adjourn the gathering.

This political course frequently encountered the resistance of workers and farmers. The experience of political struggle proved how ephemeral their hopes for radical changes were.

The Non-Partisan League of North Dakota provides the best example of how difficult it was for democratic organizations to stand their ground in the fierce struggle. The systematic campaign of slander which big business conducted against it set many conservative farmers and the urban petty bourgeoisie against the local authorities who were controlled by the League. In 1921, the reactionary circles of the Republican Party succeeded in having early elections called in North Dakota and in defeating the League's candidates in them. The defeat was so shattering that the influence of the Non-Partisan League rapidly declined.

On the other hand, participants in the democratic movement became increasingly disillusioned in the political course followed by C.P.P.A. leaders. In a number of cases, workers and farmers switched over to independent action through their own political organizations. This set the stage for further development of the movement for a third party which in 1923 spread among the working class and farmers and was rapidly gaining strength in the unions. In March 1923, at the initiative of the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League, a national labor party referendum was put out directly to 35,000 local unions of the A.F.L. and Railroad Brotherhoods. Despite opposition from the trade union bureaucracy, 7,000 locals supported the labor party slogan.<sup>1</sup>

The labor left stepped up its activities considerably in 1923. The Chicago Federation of Labor and the F.L.P. issued a call for a general convention of democratic organizations for the purpose of uniting the efforts of all forces opposed to the two existing political parties and organizing on that basis a mass Farmer-Labor Party.

The Workers Party supported the call. In June 1923, at a meeting of representatives of the Workers Party and the

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, pp. 206-07.

Chicago Federation of Labor, it was agreed that if half a million workers and farmers were represented at the forthcoming convention the new party should be launched.<sup>1</sup>

The energetic actions of the labor left alarmed conservative trade union leaders. The A.F.L. executive council began to work against the convention. Among other things, it tried to pressure the Chicago Federation of Labor into withdrawing its endorsement of the convention by threatening to cut off its subsidy. The leaders of the Railroad Brotherhoods also tried to influence the Fitzpatrick group and hamper its cooperation with the Communists. The Socialists worked in the same direction. As a result of the strong pressure, the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor began to waver and grow cool toward the coming convention.

The convention opened, as scheduled, on July 3, 1923. It brought together approximately 600,000 workers and farmers, represented by 650 delegates<sup>2</sup> sent by the West Virginia Federation of Labor, the A.F.L. central labor councils of Detroit, Minneapolis and Buffalo, the large mine workers and needle workers unions, a number of smaller labor organizations and the Farmer-Labor parties of 14 states.

From the outset, however, the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor began working against the agreed-upon plans. First they tried to reject the credentials of the Workers Party delegates. This move was defeated almost unanimously by the convention. But Fitzpatrick and his supporters did not stop maneuvering. They argued against the immediate creation of a new party and intended to go no further than working out plans for a campaign to form such a party in the future. They proposed that in the meantime all the organizations present should affiliate to the already existing Farmer-Labor Party as autonomous units.

The Workers Party delegates, sticking to the initial agreements, voiced their opposition to the new proposals and were supported by a clear majority. By a vote of 500 to 40 the

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Year of the Workers Party of America. Report of the Central Executive Committee to the Third National Convention. Held in Chicago, Illinois, December 30-31, 1923 and January 1-2, 1924, Chicago, 1924, p. 17.*

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 216.

convention decided to organize a new political party, to be called the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

The Communists submitted a draft program for the new party. Its main demand was for the nationalization of all public utilities, including communications and transportation. Its demands for social legislation included the eight-hour day, abolition of child labor, a federal minimum wage, a federal system of social insurance, and an additional excess profits tax. For the farmers, the draft program called for a five-year moratorium on all farm mortgage debts and advanced the principle of eliminating landlordism and assuring the land to the users.<sup>1</sup>

The debate on the draft program was fierce. The Chicago Federation of Labor and F.L.P. leaders were against its adoption, arbitrarily calling its main points "Red" and "Communist".<sup>2</sup> The program worked out by the Communists defined the big monopolies as the chief enemy of the masses of workers and farmers. It was a program of broad democratic reforms. But many of the delegates felt that it was too radical and some showed a tendency toward returning to the C.P.P.A. and supporting Senator La Follette in the coming elections.

Still, the Workers Party delegates won out, and the platform they proposed was adopted. On July 5, 1923, the last day of the convention, the leadership of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party (F.F.L.P.) was elected. William Bouck, member of the F.L.P. Washington chapter, became Executive Committee chairman, and Communist Joseph Manly was chosen secretary-treasurer.

Before long, however, many of the labor and farmer organizations that had joined with the left wing began to leave the newly formed party. One after another the major labor unions and the basic F.L.P. organizations quit its ranks, with the F.L.P. organizations of only four states (Washington, Montana, South Dakota and Wisconsin) staying in. Barely getting started, the new party went into decline. It had failed to

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book, 1923-1924*, Vol. 5, New York, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times*, July 6, 1923, p. 15.

win the masses of workers and farmers. Thus, the attempt to create an independent mass party of working people undertaken in 1923 by the labor left ended in failure.

What were the main reasons for the defeat? A large share of the blame lay with the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor who rejected the political course agreed upon prior to the convention. Their attacks against the Communists, which were picked up by the bourgeois press, kept many delegates from supporting the Workers Party's proposal for establishing a new political party.

But, leaving aside the anti-communist campaign that the Fitzpatrick group began in 1923, it must be conceded that its argument against the formation of a third party also had some reasons behind it. Despite the fact that the democratic movement was becoming broader, most of its participants were not yet ready to break with the two-party system and were still following the moderate-liberal politicians. They were also still planning to have their candidates in the 1924 elections run on the slates of the existing political parties. Even in the left wing there were strong tendencies in favor of supporting progressive candidates like La Follette. Consequently, there was no solid basis for the formation of a third party at that time.

Under those circumstances, the course toward the immediate establishment of the F.F.L.P. which the Communists took was a tactical error on their part.

Much of the explanation for the Communists' erroneous position lay in the fact that strong sectarian tendencies still existed in their ranks. The communist leaders overestimated the revolutionary potentialities of the American proletariat. They interpreted the labor party slogan as a call to organize immediately a party with an anti-capitalist platform. It was impossible to form a mass labor party with such a program in the United States in the early 1920s because the great majority of American workers, while supporting the struggle for democratic reforms, were not ready to work for the destruction of the capitalist system.

The split of the left wing of the progressive movement which took place at the Chicago convention of 1923 visibly weakened the labor left. The break with the Fitzpatrick group isolated the



Communists from the left wing of the A.F.L., which followed the lead of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

Yet, as the 1924 election campaign approached, unity of all left forces was becoming especially important. The campaign was to decide whether the workers and farmers would follow the vanguard of the working class or the moderate-liberal Progressive leaders.

## CHAPTER V

### THE 1924 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND THE LA FOLLETTE MOVEMENT

Throughout most of 1924 the attention of all classes and parties in the United States was centered on the presidential election campaigns. They were held that year against a background of a deflation of the revolutionary wave in Europe and of the labor movement in the United States. The capitalist world had entered a period of temporary partial stabilization. On the other hand, the Soviet Union, having fought off the attacks of its internal and foreign enemies, had scored considerable successes in restoring its industry, transport and agriculture. Its economic growth was coupled with a growth of its international prestige, which was reflected in the establishment of diplomatic relations with many Western countries.

The domestic situation in the United States was characterized on the whole by a favorable economic picture. An upswing in industry had begun in 1923. However, by far not in all parts of the American economy were things looking up. In a number of industries, especially the consumer goods industry, stagnation and undercapacity production continued. Chronic unemployment was still a major problem, and the situation was even worse in agriculture, where the continuing crisis of overproduction was ruining great numbers of small farmers. Congressman Robert Doughton summed up the situation when on June 5, 1924, he said in the House of Representatives: "The farmers of the country today are in distress, and in the West and Northwest they are in poverty and bankruptcy, and still this session of the present Republican Congress is drawing to a close without affording any adequate relief."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, June 5 to June 7, 1924, Washington, 1924, p. 10719.

These circumstances stirred American workers and farmers to greater political activity, which considerably influenced the whole course of the election campaign.

The Republicans and the Democrats held their conventions in the summer of 1924. The Republican convention, which took place June 10-12 in Cleveland, went off with the undivided hegemony of the old guard Republicans. All attempts by a small group of La Follette followers from the Wisconsin delegation to get some of the propositions from his program included in the Republican platform were categorically rejected. The platform that was adopted praised the Republican Administration for having ensured economic prosperity. The Republican Party promised the voters to maintain the high standard of living, to help the farmers and defend the interests of the workers, and to pass laws abolishing child labor and reducing the workweek. Measures to limit immigration were also approved.

In the sphere of foreign policy, the Republicans promised to ensure peace by keeping the United States out of the League of Nations and by refraining from entering into political commitments which "would involve us in the conflict of European politics"; to limit spending for the Army and Navy; and to maintain friendly relations with the countries of Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

As anticipated, Calvin Coolidge was chosen the Republican Party candidate for President. His running mate was Charles Dawes, a no less conservative figure, a big Chicago banker and author of a reparations plan widely publicized at that time.

The results of the Democratic convention were similar. True, the Democrats tried to make political capital with a noisy exposure of corruption in the government during the Harding Republican Administration. Their platform levelled a number of charges against the Republican Administration, which had increased taxes, passed the protectionist Fordney-McCumber tariff causing prices of industrial goods to rise, etc. On the other hand, it lauded the services of the Wilson Administration. The Democrats promised to follow the "Wilsonian

<sup>1</sup> Kirk H. Porter, *National Party Platforms, 1840-1924*, New York, 1924, p. 498.

tradition" and promote international cooperation through the League of Nations, lighten the tax burden, change tariffs in favor of the farmers, stabilize industry and finance, ensure full employment, limit arms appropriations, provide aid to war veterans, introduce laws prohibiting child labor, etc. With regard to the rights of citizens, the platform stated: "The Democratic Party believes in equal rights to all and special privilege to none."<sup>1</sup> As can be seen, to win votes the Democrats were not sparing in promises.

The Party bosses' choice was John W. Davis, a legal consultant for the house of Morgan, and accordingly it was Davis who was nominated as the Democratic presidential candidate. Charles Bryan, Governor of Nebraska and the brother of the well-known politician William Jennings Bryan, became the vice-presidential candidate.

The pre-election period was marked by great political activity on the part of working people. In 1922 and 1923 progressive elements in the labor movement, including the Communists, worked hard to organize a mass party of the working people. The struggle for the establishment of such a party continued strong in 1924. In the spring of that year, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and other radical F.L.P. groups sponsored preparations for a general convention of all left groups. The convention was scheduled for June 17, 1924. In the meantime, left circles were discussing the question of possible candidates for President who might be endorsed by radical F.L.P. organizations. As time passed Senator La Follette's name was mentioned more and more frequently. It must be said that La Follette himself contributed to this to no small extent. His speeches and public statements, as well as some of his actions in the spring of 1924 were calculated to create the impression that he was ready to break with the Republicans and enter the race as a third party candidate. La Follette had many supporters in radical labor and farmer organizations. Taking into account the popular sentiment the Workers Party declared that the Communists would endorse La Follette's candidacy if it was advanced and approved by a convention of the left wing.

<sup>1</sup> Kirk H. Porter, *Op. cit.*, p. 476.



La Follette and other moderates, not wanting an open break with the two-party system, were afraid that the democratic organizations of working people might unite at the convention into a mass Farmer-Labor Party. Such an outcome would mean the collapse of the Progressives' tactical line, and that was why, before the election campaign got under way, La Follette deemed it necessary to dissociate himself from the radical groups and from the convention they were preparing. Moreover, he attempted to discredit the political course of the left wing in the eyes of the public.

On May 28, 1924, he published an open letter to the Attorney General of Wisconsin in which he condemned the leaders of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party for cooperating with the Communists and for inviting delegates from the Workers Party to the left-wing convention. On this basis, he refused to support the convention and called on all his supporters to follow his example.

La Follette's actions met with strong disapproval in left-wing circles. The Minnesota F.L.P. published a statement totally refuting La Follette's attacks against the Communists. They pointed out that they, too, disagreed with the Workers Party on many points. Moreover, they felt that this could in no way obstruct their cooperation with it in working for the establishment of a third party.

On the other hand, all who were fundamentally opposed to the formation of an independent mass party immediately supported La Follette. Laying aside their former differences, the leaders of the American Federation of Labor (who opposed any form of independent political action) and the leaders of the basic liberal groups of Progressives standing at the head of the C.P.P.A. united in the fight against the spread of radicalism.

La Follette's letter and the subsequent campaign by conservative union leaders against participation in the left-wing convention had an impact on many organizations which had earlier responded favorably to the call of the Minnesota F.L.P. The ranks of the supporters of the left wing began noticeably to dwindle.

The convention opened in St. Paul on June 17, 1924. More than 500 delegates from 29 states came to take part in it. It

turned out, however, that the convention was insufficiently representative. The response from the trade union movement was especially weak. Only two large unions sent official delegations—the United Mine Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. All the other union activists that came to St. Paul belonged to small local organizations.

By the time of the convention, the left wing had weakened, with only relatively small groups of progressive workers and farmers remaining on its side. The situation demanded a new approach to the question of left-wing tactics in the election campaign. Some of the leading figures on the left realized the necessity for such a re-examination. William Mahoney, one of the oldest farmer leaders of Minnesota and a veteran of the Populist movement, warned that the immediate formation of a new party at that time was premature and could be a serious impediment to concerted actions by all the participants in the progressive movement in the 1924 elections.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, a different point of view prevailed at the convention. After lengthy debate, the decision was made to establish the National Farmer-Labor Party and to launch a campaign for its candidates.

The convention then adopted an election platform, most of the points in which directed the mass movement along the path of a nation-wide struggle to bring about democratic changes and limit the power of the monopolies. The platform demanded, among other things, nationalization of the major monopoly associations in industry, banking and transport; a legislated minimum wage and maximum workday; a federal system of social insurance; transfer of land ownership to those who work it; ensuring equal rights of Negroes; immediate recognition of the Soviet Union; the right of self-determination to all the colonial possessions of the U.S.A. The platform reflected the dissatisfaction of progressive workers and farmers with the existing situation in the country and their urge to achieve thorough democratic reforms. At the same time, however, the authors underestimated the significance of the anti-monopoly movement, and sought to move as quickly

<sup>1</sup> *The New Republic*, July 2, 1924, p. 153.

as possible beyond that first stage, setting before the workers and farmers clearly premature goals of anti-capitalist revolutionary struggle.

The choice of the left forces' presidential candidate in 1924 was the subject of heated debate at the convention. Some of the delegates favored supporting La Follette, but at the insistence of the Workers Party it was decided that the convention could accept him as the candidate only if he ran as a Farmer-Labor candidate, accepted the Party's platform and agreed to its control over the election campaign and funds. Needless to say, this decision ruled out any possibility of agreement with La Follette's followers. The convention chose as its candidate for President Duncan McDonald, a labor leader, and for Vice-President, William Bouck, chairman of the F.F.L.P. Executive Committee.

In counterbalance to the actions of the left wing, the leaders of the C.P.P.A. launched a broad campaign in favor of La Follette. Opposing the decisions of the St. Paul convention and exploiting the errors of its leaders, they exerted appreciable influence on the workers and farmers taking part in the general democratic movement. The left wing of the movement began to vacillate as well, and the number of supporters of an independent election campaign rapidly diminished. The National Farmer-Labor Party established in June 1924 shrank to a small organization, isolated from the masses.

The C.P.P.A. convention opened on July 4, 1924, in Cleveland, bringing together about 600 delegates representing various worker and farmer organizations and other democratic groupings. The largest group of delegates were the trade union activists. In all, the convention represented at least four million people, which indicated the continuing development of the democratic movement in the United States.

Speakers at the convention emphasized that the popular masses were becoming aware of the need to put an end to monopoly domination in the political life of the country. The delegate from North Dakota, Senator Lynn Frazier, said: "Farmers and laborers have in the past been kept out of politics while the big business interests went in. I am glad to see

the people are waking up, and hope they will kick out the grafting politicians...."<sup>1</sup>

However, the level of political consciousness of the bulk of the delegates remained low. The absence of representatives of the left groups enabled the Progressive leaders to steer the convention proceedings in the direction they wanted. They concentrated their efforts on lauding the candidacy of Senator La Follette, ignoring the question of a third party and the prospects for its formation. At a meeting of the organizing committee, Robert La Follette, Jr., appeared and stated that his father intended to run as an independent candidate and would under no circumstance agree to run as a third party candidate.<sup>2</sup>

On July 5, the convention nominated La Follette to run for President on the basis of a platform he himself had drawn up.<sup>3</sup>

It was left up to La Follette to choose his running mate, and he recommended Burton K. Wheeler, a prominent Democrat, a senator from the state of Montana and one of the active members of the farmers' bloc in Congress. Wheeler was the first Democratic congressman to openly side with La Follette. In mid-July 1924 he had publicly announced his refusal to vote for his Party's Candidate in view of the close ties between Davis and the big monopolies. He willingly accepted the vice-presidential nomination, but stressed that his running as an independent Progressive candidate did not mean that he was breaking with the Democratic Party.<sup>4</sup> This position suited La Follette and other moderate liberals in the Progressive movement, for essentially they remained loyal to the traditional two-party system and had no desire to see a third party created.

The C.P.P.A. election platform was based on a program proposed by La Follette himself.<sup>\*</sup> Its strong side was its anti-monopoly drive: the main objective was to break the economic and political power of the monopolies. To this end, the C.P.P.A. platform set forth such important demands as

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, July 6, 1924, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times*, July 20, 1924.



public ownership of the nation's railroads and water power, public control over all natural resources, restraint on the profits of middleman firms, increased taxation of large incomes and inheritance, restoration of the excess profits tax, and a surtax on dividends and undistributed profits of big companies.

The platform also contained many demands aimed at protecting the interests of workers and farmers. Among these were recognition of the workers' unconditional right to organize and engage in collective bargaining; abolition of court injunctions in labor disputes; adoption of labor legislation for women and juveniles; public works for the unemployed during economic depression; reduction of railway rates; and low-interest credit to farmers. Finally, the platform called for broad democratization of the political system, demanding strict observance of free speech, press and assembly, limitation of the powers of the Supreme Court, direct elections for president and vice-president, use of the referendum in deciding questions of war and peace, and condemnation of imperialist policies and militarism.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, La Follette's platform was unquestionably a progressive document. It certainly could have become the basis for uniting all anti-monopoly forces in the struggle for improving the people's economic position, breaking the power of the financial oligarchy and bringing about progressive changes in the existing system. It was no accident that the big monopolists and their political representatives were unanimous in their opposition to La Follette's program, especially to its demand for public ownership of the nation's railroads and water power.<sup>2</sup>

But it should not be forgotten that the platform had certain shortcomings. The general nationalization plans and the basic proposals for social legislation were much more moderate than, for example, the corresponding points in the National Farmer-Labor Party's platform adopted in St. Paul. In contrast to the F.L.P. program, La Follette's lacked such important demands as those for a legislated minimum wage and

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 6, New York, 1925, pp. 124-26.

<sup>2</sup> *La Follette's Magazine*, June 1924, p. 85; *Nation*, July 16, 1924, p. 64.

maximum workday, a federal system of social insurance, and special relief for small farmers. And the platform adopted in Cleveland completely ignored the Negro question.

Thus, La Follette's program was highly contradictory. While seeking to limit the power of the monopolies and carry out democratic changes, it reflected deep-going reformist illusions, actual rejection of a third party, adherence to a system based on private property, and anti-communist prejudices. Nonetheless, with all its petty-bourgeois limitations, the platform undeniably played a progressive role. The main service it rendered was to channel the indeterminate discontent of millions of working people into the general democratic, anti-monopoly struggle and, consequently, to a certain extent to help raise the political consciousness of the masses. Regardless of its subjective tendencies, it could have paved the way for the further progress of the mass movement.

La Follette's candidacy and platform found support in the labor movement. In a number of A.F.L. unions the movement against the Federation's non-partisan policy was growing, and demands were voiced for the formation of an independent mass labor party. These demands of the rank-and-file membership were reflected even at the regular convention of the A.F.L. held in November 1924, in El Paso, Texas. The delegates from the National Brotherhood of Porters voiced their disagreement with the A.F.L. non-partisan policy and urged that the Federation abandon it and begin direct political action as a labor party.

Resolutions calling for the establishment of a mass labor party based on labor unions were made by delegates from other unions as well. These sentiments became increasingly widespread in the labor movement as election time approached. The two bourgeois parties had named out-and-out reactionaries as their candidates, and hundreds of thousands of A.F.L. rank and file, indignant over the anti-labor stance of Coolidge and Davis, increasingly insisted on either supporting the Progressives or forming a labor party. The A.F.L. executive council finally had to give in to the pressure of the masses. For the first time in the history of the organization, it abandoned its long-standing non-partisan policy and endorsed La Follette and Wheeler.

While taking this step, the A.F.L. leadership had no intention of withdrawing its support of the two-party system. In early August 1924, it issued a statement saying that endorsement of La Follette and Wheeler could in no way be construed as A.F.L. endorsement of the movement for independent political action or for a third party, and that the traditional policy of "non-partisanship" remained one of its guiding principles.<sup>1</sup>

The La Follette movement embraced broad sections of the American people, above all the farmers. The rapid spread of radical ideas in different parts of America was noted in some quarters with alarm. Republican Congressman Clifton Woodrum, for example, stated on the floor of the House of Representatives that the Republican Party was being shattered by blows dealt to it one after another by rebel groups in the West. As the elections approached, he said, ominous trends were increasing, and among them was frightening talk about a third party.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the main groupings taking part in the progressive movement rallied around La Follette and his election platform. As a result there emerged a broad, though loose, coalition of democratic forces which went down in history as the La Follette Movement.

In the meantime, the Workers Party launched its own presidential campaign as a separate and independent party. When most of the radical groups of workers and farmers switched over to side with the C.P.P.A. and La Follette, the Communists and other left-wing figures realized that a separate National Farmer-Labor Party campaign was inexpedient. On July 10, the central executive committee of the Workers Party decided against endorsing the F.L.P. candidates. However, the Party also refused to support La Follette and named William Foster as its own candidate for president. That same day, the executive committee of the Farmer-Labor Party withdrew its candidates McDonald and Bouck and called on all their supporters to vote for the candidates of the Workers Party.

<sup>1</sup> *American Federationist*, September 1924, p. 708.

<sup>2</sup> See, *Congressional Record*, May 20, 1924, p. 9016.

In its election campaign, instead of bringing to the foreground the urgent problems of democratic and anti-monopoly struggle, the Workers Party put out slogans, premature for the conditions at the time, calling for the destruction of the capitalist system and the establishment of a workers' and farmers' government.<sup>1</sup>

This was a tactical error—a fact which the leaders of the communist movement in the United States later admitted.<sup>2</sup> Objectively, that line led to the isolation of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat from the workers and farmers in the democratic movement. The line was chosen as a result of ideas, widespread in the Communist movement then, to the effect that in all developed capitalist countries, including the United States, there were no immediate democratic goals to be achieved, and the task at hand was to carry out a socialist revolution and make a direct transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Overestimating the revolutionary potential of the American working class, the Communists underestimated the importance of struggle for the satisfaction of partial demands within the general democratic campaign. Instead, in its day-to-day activities it laid emphasis on the ultimate goals of the labor movement. As a consequence, millions of working people who were only just awakening to the simplest forms of political action, were left under the undivided influence of the petty-bourgeois ideologists.

La Follette and Wheeler made their first appearances before the voters in September 1924 and called for vigorous struggle against the monopolies and their representatives in the government. In his very first campaign speech on the radio in early September, La Follette said that the prosperity, happiness and economic freedom of both the farmers and industrial workers were threatened by the same enemy—the monopolies, and that the workers and farmers had to undertake united political action to fight that threat. He urged

<sup>1</sup> See, *Daily Worker*, August 6, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> See, William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 220; Tom Foley, "The La Follette Campaign of 1924", *Political Affairs*, September-October, 1969, pp. 31-40.



the farmers not to reject the friendly hand which the workers of the cities were extending to them.

In October 1924, La Follette toured the country, visiting the big cities in New England and the mid-Atlantic states, going through the industrial centers in the Great Lakes region and the agricultural areas of the Midwest. In all his speeches he called for struggle against monopoly dominance, denounced the corruption in the Republican Administration and the government's policies, and expounded the program of reforms outlined in the C.P.P.A. election platform. La Follette's energetic campaigning strengthened the hopes of democratic forces for a victory at the polls.

Not surprisingly, the Progressives' campaign alarmed big business politicians. Republicans and Democrats alike, putting aside their own quarrels, came out jointly against Senator La Follette as their common political enemy. To sway the voter masses they distorted La Follette's views and called him a dangerous radical, a Red, a Communist, a destroyer of American institutions. Leaders of the Republican and Democratic Parties made every effort to twist the real meaning of La Follette's economic platform, to conceal its anti-monopoly thrust, and to make it appear that its implementation would result in the socialization of industry and the liquidation of the private enterprise system.

The closer election day came, the more they resorted to crude pressure and intimidation. On more than one occasion managers of big industrial firms coerced their employees into pledging their votes to Coolidge and sometimes even into contributing to the Republican campaign fund, threatening to discharge anyone who refused to do so or indicated support of the Progressives' candidate. Day after day, employers tried to frighten their workers, painting a gruesome picture of the economic depression, mass lay-offs and millions of unemployed, which would inevitably befall the United States if La Follette were elected.

Thus, the Progressives encountered serious difficulties. The reactionaries were united against them. To conduct a successful campaign the Progressives urgently required the unity and cohesion of all democratic forces.

But this unity was lacking. Major labor and farmer

organizations remained isolated one from the other, acted independently and by far not always gave La Follette the support he needed. A.F.L. unions hardly gave any real support at all. The farmers' forces were fragmented. Only a few relatively small radical organizations rallied around the C.P.P.A. Among them were the Farmer-Labor parties of a number of Western states and the few Non-Partisan League organizations that were still in existence by that time. Meanwhile, the Republicans were busy persuading farmers that their interests conflicted with those of the industrial proletariat, that in the Farmer-Labor Party they would become merely an instrument of the urban workers, and that they could get a lot more from the Republican Party.

Finally, the Progressives got almost no support from the Black population—the direct result of the fact that La Follette and his supporters had essentially ignored the Negro question.

It became clear by election day that, on the whole, La Follette's campaign had received a much smaller voter response than could have been expected, say, immediately after the C.P.P.A. Cleveland convention. The objective basis for this obvious change in the mood of the masses was the considerable improvement in the economic situation that came in 1924. The rapid economic upswing that began during the period of temporary partial stabilization of capitalism, coupled with ever louder bourgeois eulogies of American "prosperity", again bolstered the petty-bourgeois illusions, shaken in the early postwar years, among millions of working people.

It should be added that serious organizational flaws also hampered the effectiveness of the La Follette campaign. With the C.P.P.A. leadership refusing to form a third party La Follette's followers were deprived of the possibility of creating a centralized and ramified party apparatus which could at least to some extent compete with the efficient Republican and Democratic Party machines developed in the course of many decades.

La Follette and his supporters also had extremely limited funds at their disposal. According to a special Senate committee's official data, their campaign fund amounted to only

\$222,000, while the Democrats spent \$904,000 on their campaign, and the Republicans \$4,270,000.<sup>1</sup>

The presidential elections took place on November 4, 1924. The Republicans won, with Coolidge polling 15.7 million votes, or 54 percent of the total vote cast. Davis received 8.4 million votes, or 29 percent, and La Follette 4,822,000 or 16.5 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The election results showed that the forecasts made by the Progressive leaders during the campaign had been far too optimistic. La Follette's defeat was the result of the ideological and organizational weaknesses of the democratic forces.

At the same time, the 1924 elections showed positive signs, for the 4.8 million votes cast for La Follette testified to the fact that there did exist a basis for further progress in the general democratic movement. However, such progress was impossible unless the democratic forces achieved strong unity and overcame their ideological and organizational weaknesses. What happened was that La Follette's defeat increased the unfavorable tendencies seen during the campaign, ushering in thereby a period of general decline in the progressive movement.

<sup>1</sup> K. C. McKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, New York, 1947, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 6, New York, 1925, p. 130.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WORKING CLASS DURING "PROSPERITY"

The features characteristic of the American labor movement during the period between 1924 and 1929 can best be understood by examining the basic trends in the country's economic development and the economic position of working people.

During that period, the monopolies spent vast sums of money to put through production efficiency measures with the aim of increasing the volume of output, lowering production costs, enhancing the competitive power of their goods and winning new positions on the world markets. The appearance of a number of new industries (production of automobiles, tractors, airplanes, electric and radio appliances and equipment, etc.) was also linked with the expansion of the domestic market. Such factors as renewal of fixed capital, technical improvements, cooperation of production and standardization contributed greatly to growth in the volume of U.S. industrial output. From 1924 to 1929, the production of steel went up from 37.9 million to 56.4 million tons, aluminum from 75,000 to 114,000 tons, crude petroleum from 713.9 million to 1,007 million barrels, and electric energy from 75,800 million to 116,700 million kwh. The dollar value of output in machine building increased from \$2,836 million to \$4,341 million, in the chemical industry from \$1,231 million to \$1,789 million, and the production of automobiles grew from 3,603,000 units



to 5,315,000.<sup>1</sup> The value of commodity exports increased from \$4,591 million to \$5,241 million. By the end of 1928, the U.S. was a creditor in the aggregate sum of \$22.3 billion and a debtor to a sum of only \$7.4 billion.<sup>2</sup> Gold flowed from abroad into the coffers of American banks and trusts.

The growth of industrial output and foreign trade prompted bourgeois economists to proclaim the onset of an era of "eternal prosperity" in the United States. Publicizing the theory of American exceptionalism, they asserted that the industrial boom was not merely a stage in the economic cycle which included crisis, recovery and boom, but the beginning of the American economy's steady progressive development.

Such assertions proved to be in gross contradiction to reality. In 1929 the industrial boom ended in a crisis. But even the years of "prosperity" saw stagnation in a number of industries (coal, textile, ship-building, shoe manufacturing, food, and others). Undercapacity in the manufacturing industries stood at 8 to 21 percent, with 9 to 22 percent in the textile, 18 to 24 percent in the chemical, and from 4 to 18 percent in the auto industry.<sup>3</sup>

Concentration of capital and the consequent strengthening of the positions of the big monopolies continued. In aluminum production, the decisive positions were held by the Mellon Trust. Steel production was concentrated at mills belonging to the three biggest companies—the Steel Trust, Bethlehem Steel and Republic Steel, the latter arising in 1929 as a result of a number of merges. Auto production was controlled by three giant companies—General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

At the same time, the concentration of banking capital continued apace. In the six years from 1923 to 1928, 4,183 banks with aggregate deposits of \$1,129,594,000 were sus-

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 360, 371, 416, 506; *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1931, pp. 816, 817, 865; *Survey of Current Business. Annual Supplement*, Washington, 1931, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *National Industrial Conference Board. The International Finance Position of the United States*, New York, 1929, p. 269; *Economic Almanac*, New York, 1960, p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> *Survey of Current Business*, February 1930, p. 115.

pended.<sup>1</sup> Several big bank mergers took place in 1929: Chase National Bank with the Equitable Trust Company, National City Bank with Farmer Loan and Trust Company, National Bank of Commerce with Guarantee Trust, and others.

The aggregate profits of all U.S. corporations, before taxes, amounted to \$7,587 million in 1924, \$9,584 million in 1925, \$9,673 million in 1926, \$8,982 million in 1927, \$10,618 million in 1928, and \$11,654 million in 1929.<sup>2</sup>

These factors had an impact on the economic position of the working class. Labor intensification grew. It was during these years that the speed-up system, or the "scientific management of industry", flourished.

Manufacturers hired efficiency engineers to devise plans for speeding up production processes, and such plans were implemented to such an extent that the human organism was often unable to withstand the pace, and workers ended up prematurely disabled.

The speed-up reached an especially high level in the auto industry, where year after year the work load was increased through the assembly line system. At one auto plant, for example, the belt moved 13 feet per minute in 1928, as compared with 3 feet per minute in 1918.<sup>3</sup>

In the textile industry, manufacturers introduced the so-called "stretch-out", whereby workers were made to operate more machines without any increase, and in a number of cases with a reduction, in wages. We might cite, by way of example, a letter that F. L. Jenckes wrote to his agent at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, expressing satisfaction with the fact that the latter had managed to cut the annual wage outlays at the mill by \$500,000 without reducing the volume of output, and adding that he hoped it would now be possible to cut out \$1,000,000 a year and still keep production up.<sup>4</sup>

According to the National Council of Industrial Conference, labor productivity in the manufacturing industries increased

<sup>1</sup> Anna Rochester, *Rulers of America*, New York, 1936, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1932, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, New York, 1929, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Robert W. Dunn, *Labor and Textiles*, New York, 1931, p. 131.

21 percent between 1923 and 1929, while wages increased only 4 percent. In the mining industry, productivity went up 27.1 points, while wages dropped 12.2 points.<sup>1</sup>

Despite greater productivity, the workday did not become shorter, in fact, it even grew longer in some industries. In the manufacturing industries it averaged 47.8 hours in 1924 and 49.1 in 1929. In the steel and textile industries it was about 54 to 55 hours.

The speed-up met with little resistance because of widespread unemployment. Secretary of Labor James J. Davis reported to the Senate on March 24, 1928, that according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics there were 1,874,050 unemployed in the country and that the number of jobless even in the very best of times never went below one million.<sup>2</sup>

There were many unemployed among the miners. Herbert Hoover was later to characterize the situation in the coal industry as follows: "There were too many mines and too many men in the industry. Prices at this time were below cost, work was intermittent, and yearly earnings of workers were insufficient to maintain a decent standard of living."<sup>3</sup>

The large numbers of unemployed lowered the standard of living of the working class as a whole. There was no unemployment insurance at all. Many jobless over 45 years of age could not find work because employers were interested in hiring only the young and strong.

Bourgeois economists claimed that the difference between the poor and the rich became less noticeable in the 1920s. In his book, *The Present Economic Revolution in the United States*, professor of political economy Thomas N. Carver of Harvard University maintained that a revolution was taking place in the distribution of the national income, with the workers getting a bigger, and the capitalists a correspondingly smaller, share.

<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon Bell, *Productivity, Wages, and National Income*, Washington, 1940, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Record*, March 24, 1928, p. 5338.

<sup>3</sup> *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover. The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933*, New York, 1952, p. 70.

Wrote Carver: "Instead of the concentration of wealth, we are now witnessing its diffusion."<sup>1</sup>

After Carver came a number of other historians and economists who spoke of the "disappearance" of classes in the United States. They pointed above all to the significant growth of the national income. It rose from \$75,200 million in 1924 to \$87,800 million in 1929.<sup>2</sup> The annual average earnings of workers in all branches of the economy in that period increased from \$1,388 to \$1,424.<sup>3</sup> But all this notwithstanding, the workers' share of the national income remained smaller than that of the capitalists, as the following figures show.<sup>4</sup>

Year	Enterprise owners	Workers	Highly-paid officials
1924	42.32	37.66	18.41
1928	42.83	36.05	19.93

In 1929, 513 super-millionaires had an aggregate income more than equalling the average wages paid to one million wage-earners. It is clear from this that no revolution in the distribution of the national income had taken place.

Wages advanced in machine building, the printing trades, auto manufacturing and the chemical and rubber industries, in railroads and construction. At the same time, however, they declined considerably in the textile, tanning, glass, tobacco, and mining industries. The following figures show the movement of the average annual earnings per worker in various sectors of the U.S. economy (in dollars)<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Thomas N. Carver, *The Present Economic Revolution in the United States*, Boston, 1926, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon Bell, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Willford I. King, *The National Income and Its Purchasing Power*, New York, 1930, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon Bell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21, 239.



Table 3

Year	All other industries	Manufacturing	Mining	Steam railroads	Construction
1924	1,338	1,245	1,624	1,529	1,739
1925	1,398	1,269	1,495	1,556	1,754
1926	1,411	1,283	1,534	1,572	1,711
1927	1,417	1,288	1,501	1,585	1,719
1928	1,420	1,299	1,434	1,608	1,725
1929	1,424	1,302	1,399	1,648	1,772

Thus, the lowest earnings were in manufacturing and mining. Moreover, there were substantial differences in wages depending on skill, sex, race and geographical location. It is important to note that during the industrial boom the position of workers improved only in the manufacturing industries named earlier and in transportation and construction. But in these industries, too, wage increases went largely to highly skilled workers, the so-called "labor aristocracy". How big this segment of the American working class was during that period can only be estimated. It is known that in 1929 there were 33 million workers employed in industry, transportation and agriculture. The highly paid skilled workers, numbering some three million (about 10 percent of all workers) received wages of over \$40 a week (\$2,000 a year).<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, about 16 million workers were making less than \$1,250 per year.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the highly paid workers were trade union members, although some groups were not. The latter accounted for about one-eighth of the steelworkers and a still smaller percentage of workers in the auto, clothing and several other industries. When economic conditions were relatively good, the well-paid workers were able to accumulate a certain amount of savings, buy a car and acquire shares of company stock.

According to official government data, individuals with big incomes (industrialists, bankers, merchants, managers, engineers, etc.) bought automobiles for cash, while workers generally bought them on the installment system. Workers and

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book I*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 9, New York, 1928, p. 54.

craftsmen accounted for 23.6 percent of the nation's car buyers.

Wages in the coal and textile industries were low, the miners' in the anthracite mines, for example, averaging \$6-\$7 a day in 1929. Working 225 days a year, their earnings ran from \$1,400 to \$1,500 a year.<sup>1</sup>

The textile mills in the South employed considerable numbers of Black workers, but there was widespread racial discrimination against them in hiring and firing, wages, acceptance to trade union membership and so forth. Discrimination was also practiced against Indians, Japanese, Chinese and immigrants from certain European countries. The going was particularly hard for agricultural laborers.

Thus, during the period of partial stabilization of capitalism in the United States, the development of the economy was very uneven. While the auto, aviation, chemical, electrical, radio and other industries were developing at a rather rapid rate, the coal, textile, shipbuilding, shoe and other industries were stagnating. All this had an effect on the economic position of the working class and to a large extent predetermined the main features of the labor movement during that period.

Bourgeois historians and economists usually pointed out with satisfaction that in the 1920s an "equilibrium" had been achieved in employer-worker relations and that there was an "absence" of disputes in industry. A report submitted to the U.S. President said: "During the past few years equilibrium has been fairly well maintained. We have not wasted the hours of labor by strikes and lockouts."<sup>2</sup> This assertion did not fully correspond to reality. The facts show that while the labor movement had weakened during that period in comparison with the period 1918-1922, there was no "class reconciliation". American workers were forced to fight defensive battles. Strikes took place primarily in industries where the situation was the most difficult for the workers.

Important strikes occurred in the mining industry. In August 1925, the Pittsburgh Coal Company controlled by Andrew Mellon, who was Secretary of the Treasury, repudiated

<sup>1</sup> Anna Rochester, *Labor and Coal in America*, New York, 1931, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Recent Economic Changes in the United States*, Vol. 1, New York, 1929, p. XXI.

the Jacksonville agreement,<sup>1</sup> cut wages by one-third and established the open shop. The company vice-president Leshner declared that the Jacksonville agreement could cause his company to lose out in the competition with companies where there were no trade unions.

Other coal companies followed suit as 110 mineowners in Pennsylvania and 50 in West Virginia violated the agreement and began to operate open shops. All this seriously undermined the position of the miners' union. In response to the employers' refusal to abide by the Jacksonville agreement, the United Mine Workers called a strike of 150,000 workers in the anthracite mines on September 1, 1925. As a result, 828 mines belonging to 135 companies were shut down.

The owners resorted to the lockout, and by September 23 they had fired 15,000 strikers. But the workers fought on. On November 21, John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America, requested President Coolidge to support the union and compel the mineowners to abide by the agreement. In his reply, Coolidge said he regretted the violations of the agreement, but explained that it was not in the government's province to look after contracts, and advised turning to the courts.

In the meantime, the Communists and others in the left wing were busy organizing a broad movement of solidarity with the miners. The *Daily Worker*, organ of the Workers Party, gave full coverage of the strike, urged the workers to intensify the struggle for their demands, and exposed the conciliatory policy of the reformist labor union leaders. When in the course of negotiations with the mineowners John L. Lewis agreed to call off the strike without winning a 10 percent wage increase and, with the bosses still refusing to abide by the agreement, the newspaper came out with the call: "Miners! Fight for your rights!... Fight for a shorter workday and workweek!"

The Miners Progressive Committee of the U.M.W.A. consisting of Communists and left-wing figures, published an

<sup>1</sup> Under the Jacksonville agreement, concluded between the union and the coal companies in February 1924, the mineowners were to pay a wage of \$7.50 a day or \$1.08 per ton of mined coal for a period of three years beginning April 1, 1924 (*The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 10, New York, 1929, p. 137).

open letter to the workers urging them to carry on the struggle to victory: "We, the rank-and-file miners, were ready to fight to the end—to victory.

"We put up the longest battle in the history of the anthracite.

"We are fighting to save our union and prevent our becoming virtual slaves."<sup>1</sup>

However, the left forces in the U.M.W.A. were inadequately organized, and most of the miners complied with Lewis' order to call off the strike. The conciliatory line taken by Lewis and other top union leaders was one of the main reasons for the failure of the strike. The miners went back to work on February 18, 1926, without gaining any concessions from the owners.

On April 1, 1927, 175,000 miners in the bituminous fields of 10 states (Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa and West Virginia) went out on strike protesting wage cuts and demanding prolongation of the Jacksonville agreement. The conditions were extremely unfavorable for the strikers. The anthracite miners, having suffered defeat the year before, were unable to walk off their jobs during the bituminous strike. The coal industry was in a crisis of overproduction, and more than 200,000 miners had been laid off. Many local union organizations had fallen to pieces. All these factors worked against the strike.

It was a tough struggle from the outset, with the coal companies using injunctions, evictions, private police, sheriffs, detectives, state troopers and all kinds of inhuman methods of coercion against the coal miners, their families and organizations. The companies brought in strikebreakers and private police. In the winter of 1927-1928, some 70 thousand families were evicted from company-owned houses. They settled in temporary cabins built nearby. However, thousands of workers came to the aid of the miners, collecting money, clothing, shoes and food. The Ohio and Pennsylvania Miners' Relief Committee, sponsored by the T.U.E.L., called for a wide fund-raising campaign to help the miners break the resistance of the coal kings.

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, February 15, 1926, pp. 1, 5.



On April 1, 1928, progressive labor forces held a conference in Pittsburgh at which 1,125 delegates represented about 100,000 miners from all over the country. The conference decided to intensify the struggle, increase the number of pickets, expand the movement in support of the strikers, draw unorganized workers into the strike, and extend the strike to the anthracite mines. After the conference several thousand more miners went out, and assistance to the strikers increased.

As the strike mounted, the courts began supporting the companies in their demands to have workers evicted from their company-owned homes and strike leaders arrested. Circuit courts in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and other states issued strike injunctions. One federal judge ruled that picket lines must be composed only of English-speaking workers, and this while there were many immigrants among the strikers who knew no English.

The harsh police and court actions could not escape public notice. Under the circumstances, Secretary of Labor Davis decided to act as "mediator" between the miners and mineowners. In early January 1928, he unsuccessfully tried to bring representatives of the companies and the union together for a conference. Three times he sent telegrams to the mineowners requesting that they appear for a conference. He had to admit that the situation in the coal industry was extremely grave, most of the mines were working only part-time, and the wages of \$2 to \$2.40 a day were lower than the "American standard".

In the U.S. Senate a number of liberal senators spoke out against violations of civil liberties. Senator Hiram Johnson introduced a resolution on January 9, 1928, calling for an investigation of the situation in the coal industry in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. Similar calls were made in the House of Representatives. On February 16, 1928, the Senate adopted Johnson's resolution, and a five-man committee was set up and made a tour of the coal regions affected by the strike.

The committee completed its work in early May 1928 and submitted a report confirming that there was a reign of company-incited terror, that private police were beating defenseless people, that miners' families were being evicted

from their homes and that the courts were issuing injunctions and violating civil liberties.

But no relief was forthcoming for the miners. The investigation was needed only for the purpose of placating public opinion.

With the help of strikebreakers and police, the mineowners finally broke the more than 15 month-long strike. It actually ended on July 18, 1928, when Lewis instructed the U.M.W.A. organizations to take back their demands concerning the Jacksonville agreement and make their own settlements with companies as best they could. The capitulation of the union leadership resulted in lower wages and worse working conditions for the miners.

Hard-fought strikes also took place in the textile industry, where workers suffered heavily from speed-up, insanitary conditions, long hours and low wages. Conditions were especially bad in the South. The mills there had long been considered the bastions of the open shop, and attempts to organize trade unions were violently opposed. In 1927, of the 600,000 textile workers in the country, 40,000 were organized, and these mostly in the North. The United Textile Workers had a membership of 20,000, and the other 20,000 belonged to other unions.

The textile unions were weakened by the policy of class collaboration pursued by their reformist leaders. In a book on textile unionism, Columbia University Professor George S. Mitchell noted that this inclination toward class collaboration was their characteristic feature. He wrote that at the United Textile Workers convention in 1928 a decision was taken obliging all of the union's organizations to assist the millowners in production questions and to resolve all disputes by negotiation, regarding strikes as "an extreme method of struggle".

Several strikes, often arising spontaneously despite the opposition of the A.F.L. leaders, took place in the textile industry between 1926 and 1929. The biggest were at mills in Passaic, New Bedford and Gastonia. These strikes were led by Communists and other left-wing activists.

The Passaic strike began in January 1926 and lasted 13 months. Working conditions there were abominable: people

worked without a break in the midst of hellish noise and breathing suffocating air poisoned with dyes. All this sapped the strength and health of the workers and caused disease (most frequently tuberculosis), premature aging and death. Many women worked in the mills, and they suffered most of all from the inhuman working conditions.

The workers at the Passaic mills were mixed (Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans, etc.), which created difficulties in organizing them.

The strike was precipitated by a wage cut in October 1925 at the Botany Mills, Garfield Worsted, Passaic Worsted, the Forstmann and Huffman Co. and other mills.

In Passaic, where the United Textile Workers and other textile unions were virtually nonexistent, the T.U.E.L. set up the Unity of Action Committee to struggle against the move and to form a union. On January 25, 1926, the U.F.C. made the following demands on behalf of the workers: (1) A 10 percent increase over the old wage scale; (2) return of money lost due to the wage cut; (3) time and a half for overtime; (4) a forty-hour week; (5) decent sanitary conditions; (6) no discrimination against union workers; and (7) recognition of the union.<sup>1</sup>

The employers refused to satisfy these demands and discharged all 45 members of the committee. On January 27, the 5,000 Botany workers struck, and the fight rapidly spread to other mills, soon involving some 16,000 textile workers. The company unions that existed at some of the mills fell apart during the strike. "The workers simply left the mills and the company union disappeared from the scene automatically," wrote Robert W. Dunn, describing the situation at the Forstmann and Huffman mills.<sup>2</sup> Over 15,000 textile workers joined the union organized by the U.F.C. The strikers led by the Unity of Action Committee began to set up their unions.

The leaders of the new union applied to the A.F.L. executive committee for affiliation to the United Textile Workers, but were refused: the A.F.L. demanded that the Communists be

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Bimba, *History of the American Working Class*, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *The Workers Monthly*, May 1926, p. 311.

removed from the leadership of the strike and the new union.

The millowners threw everything they could against the workers. They used the courts, the police, citizens' peace committees and every means of propaganda in an effort to break the strike. Police and company agents dispersed worker meetings and demonstrations, and tear gas was used against pickets. Dozens of workers were beaten and more than 200 persons were arrested. The bosses set up Vigilance Committees that included members of the Ku Klux Klan, the American Legion and the clergy. The Vigilantes raided premises of the strikers. Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey Bentley issued an order banning the strike.

Despite all this, the workers continued to organize their forces to expand the strike and staunchly walked the picket lines. At times war veterans donned their old army helmets and gas masks to ward off the police attacks. Women took their children and joined the pickets. Children carried posters "We want milk" and "Don't let us go hungry".

The strike committee sent a delegation to President Coolidge to ask the federal government to stop the terror against the strikers and to investigate the situation in the strike regions where elementary civil liberties were being violated. However, Coolidge could not find the time to talk with the workers. Secretary of Labor Davis took measures to terminate the strike.

But the workers held on. The Workers Party and the T.U.E.L. conducted a campaign to organize help for the Passaic workers. Day by day, the *Daily Worker* reported on the course of the strike, exposing the policy of the conciliatory A.F.L. leaders and encouraging the workers to fight on to final victory. In mid-April 1926, the Party published a statement exposing the government as a strikebreaker and calling on all labor organizations to make the fight of the Passaic workers their own and to contribute to their strike and relief fund.

Through the efforts of the left wing of the labor movement, a national conference was held in Passaic to discuss ways of helping the strikers. Attended by 200 delegates representing 500,000 workers, the conference resolved to increase aid to the textile workers through a drive to collect money, food and clothing.



The solidarity movement induced the U.T.W. Executive Committee to take steps to help the Passaic strikers. At the A.F.L. Convention in Detroit in October 1926, U.T.W. president Thomas McMahon and other delegates from the union introduced a resolution proposing that the A.F.L. unions come to the aid of the Passaic textile workers. The convention passed the resolution and instructed the officials of the affiliated unions to donate the necessary funds. Support from the A.F.L. unions helped break the resistance of the millowners. A month later, on November 11, 1926, the Passaic Worsted Spinning Company signed an agreement with the strike committee and recognized the union.

On December 13, 1926, the big Botany Mills recognized the union and signed an agreement compensating the wage cut and reinstating the strikers who had been discharged.<sup>1</sup> The *Daily Worker* wrote that the victory of the strike, which had lasted for more than 10 months, was irrefutable testimony to the correctness of the left-wing policy and tactics. In the following months other mills followed suit by recognizing the union and concluding agreements with it.

On April 16, 1928, 27,000 workers at 56 mills in New Bedford struck against a 10 percent wage cut. The leaders of the U.T.W. opposed the strike, although a number of its locals had decided it was necessary.

The strike lasted six months but ended in defeat due to the combined efforts of the reformist union leaders, the millowners and the police.

The Passaic and New Bedford strikes had a big influence on the subsequent development of the textile workers' struggle. In April 1929, strikes broke out in Elizabethton (Tenn.), Piedmont (S.C.) and Marion and Gastonia (N.C.). The T.U.E.L. and the Workers Party (that year re-named the Communist Party of the U.S.A.) sent organizers into Gastonia and other textile centers. On March 30, 1929, a mass meeting of workers at the Loray mills in Gastonia decided to form a local textile union and announced a set of demands, including a minimum weekly wage of \$20, improved working conditions, a 40-hour

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 15, 1926.

week, union recognition, and no discrimination against union members. The managers rejected the demands and fired several worker activists, as a result of which the workers called a strike for April 4. To combat the strike the employers set up the Committee of 100. On April 18, police arrested and beat up strike leaders.

In view of constant raids by the police, the strike committee decided to put up guards at the workers' lodgings and union headquarters. An armed detachment of 60 men was formed for this purpose. Many bourgeois newspapers ran a campaign of slander against the strikers. *The New York Times* published an article saying that the strike in Gastonia constituted a threat to the government and the whole nation. It quoted U.S. Department of Labor spokesman Charles Wood as saying that no reconciliation was possible in Loray until the workers stopped following their communist leaders. Wood approved of calling in troops to suppress the strike.

The propaganda onslaught against the strikers became especially fierce after armed clashes between workers and police on June 7, 1929. On the morning of that day, the police opened fire on a picket line. The workers fired back. The chief of police, who led the attack, was wounded and died on the following day. One worker and three policemen were wounded. Police arrested over 100 workers, and the strike leaders were charged with murder.

The trial began on August 26, and the prosecutor demanded the death penalty. Immediately, a movement in defense of the Gastonia strike leaders sprang up throughout the country. In riots that followed a protest meeting vigilantes murdered Ella May Wiggin, a mother of five and union organizer in the textile industry. The liberal press carried articles supporting the strike leaders. An article in the *New Republic* described the hard working conditions, suppression of unions and violation of civil rights in Gastonia.

On October 21, seven strike leaders were given prison sentences of up to 20 years. Protests against the court verdict came from all parts of the country and from abroad. The sentences were appealed to a higher court, and the convicted were released on \$10,000 bail each, whereupon they fled the country.

Strikes took place in other textile centers, and in the course of the struggle thousands of unorganized workers joined union organizations. They were all united on a national scale when left-wing unionists and Communists called a conference in New York on September 22-23, 1928, and set up the progressive National Textile Workers Union, which was affiliated to the T.U.E.L.

The conference decided on an action program which included such measures as organizing union locals at the textile mills in the South, setting up rank-and-file committees to combat unemployment, and conducting a campaign of solidarity with the U.S.S.R. The new union put out a monthly magazine called *The National Textile Worker*.

Elsewhere, new trade union organizations emerged during strikes in the clothing, shoe and other industries. The influence of the T.U.E.L. grew. The fourth convention of the T.U.E.L., which took place August 31-September 1, 1929, in Cleveland, was attended by 690 delegates from 18 states, representing 70,000 trade union members.<sup>1</sup> A decision was made then to reorganize the T.U.E.L. and to call it the Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.). The new League was formed by 13 unions. William Foster was elected Secretary General.

The T.U.U.L. program called for the organization of the unorganized, industrial unionism, the seven-hour day, social insurance, full equality for the Negro people, establishment of contacts with the Red International of Labor Unions, and unity of world labor in the struggle against war.

Characterizing the major difference between the T.U.U.L. and the T.U.E.L., William Foster wrote that "whereas the old T.U.E.L. placed the main stress upon the work within the conservative trade unions, the new Trade Union Unity League put its main emphasis upon the organization of the unorganized into industrial unions".<sup>2</sup> Although the T.U.U.L. was not large in terms of membership, it nonetheless played a definite role in the U.S. labor movement.

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book I*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, pp. 257-58.

The emergence of progressive trade unions was a natural result of the development of the labor movement and the desire of the workers for unity. These unions helped to develop the strike struggle.

The general picture of the strike movement during that period, as compared with 1919, was as follows<sup>1</sup>:

	1919	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Number of strikes	3,630	1,249	1,301	1,035	707	604	921
Workers involved (in thousands)	4,160	655	428	330	330	314	289

As the figures show, there was a general decline in the labor movement during the latter half of the twenties, with strikes, mostly of an economic and defensive nature, occurring in only a few industries.

During that period, in addition to the strike struggle, the working class engaged in a vigorous movement to save Nicolo Sacco and Bartholomeo Vanzetti, two workers of Italian origin who were arrested in May 1920 and falsely charged with committing a robbery in which the paymaster of a shoe factory was killed.

The case was an obvious frame-up, the real reason for the arrest being the two men's active participation in the class struggle of the American proletariat. They hated the capitalist system, spoke against U.S. participation in the World War, and worked among the rank and file, especially immigrants, fighting for the creation of trade unions and organizing strikes in Plymouth and other cities,<sup>2</sup> for all of which they earned the intense hatred of the bosses.

After years of litigation and despite a world-wide protest movement in their behalf, Sacco and Vanzetti were finally executed on August 23, 1927.

<sup>1</sup> Florence Peterson, *Strikes in the United States 1880-1936*, Washington, 1938, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> See, Arthur Garfield Hays, *Let Freedom Ring*, New York, 1928, p. 281.





6. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti

The ruling circles of the United States sought to isolate the U.S.S.R. and pursued a policy of its nonrecognition. The bourgeoisie put up every kind of obstacle to keep truthful information about Soviet life from the American people. Nevertheless, news of Soviet successes in economic and cultural development reached the people in many ways.

Visits to the U.S.S.R. by delegations of American workers were of great importance in familiarizing Americans with the life of the Soviet people. The first such delegation, composed of left-wing labor figures and representatives of other groups, went to the Soviet Union in 1927. The delegates met with leaders of the Soviet Government and the Communist Party, and toured a number of Soviet industrial centers, including Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Baku and cities in the Donets Basin. They were greatly impressed by Soviet achievements in both the economic and cultural spheres. James H. Maurer, president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor and leader of the delegation, declared: "Not a single member of the

delegation doubts that the U.S.S.R. is really building a socialist economy." In another statement he said: "The proletariat of the whole world is in duty bound to support the Soviet Union workers in their work, as the cause of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is our own cause."<sup>1</sup>

Upon returning to the United States, the delegates related their impressions to numerous large meetings. In New York, where 12,000 people turned out for a meeting to greet the returning delegation, a resolution was passed demanding the immediate recognition of the Soviet Government and the establishment of diplomatic relations with it.

On the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution, three meetings of solidarity with the U.S.S.R. were held in New York in November 1927. Similar meetings took place in Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago and elsewhere. At all of them, the participants condemned the imperialist provocations against the Soviet Union and demanded recognition of the Soviet Government. Demonstrations were held in front of the British Embassy in Washington, protesting raids by British police against the Soviet trade mission offices in London and the All-Russia Cooperative Society, Ltd. (ARCOS).

The ideas of friendship and solidarity with the U.S.S.R. found ever greater response in worker, farmer and intellectual circles. In 1925, William E. B. Du Bois, an outstanding figure in the Negro liberation movement, visited the Soviet Union. He enthusiastically hailed the achievements in the building of socialism and the success of the policy of friendship and equality among the country's various nationalities.

The Fourth Pan-African Congress, which took place in New York in 1927 under the general chairmanship of W.E.B. Du Bois, adopted a resolution expressing gratitude to the Soviet Government of Russia for the help it extended to the colored races.<sup>2</sup>

The efforts of the American working class to gain U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union were considerably hampered

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, September 14, 1927, p. 3; September 16, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See, Francis L. Broderick, *W.E.B. Du Bois, Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis*, Stanford, 1959, p. 132.

by the splitting activities of the A.F.L. leaders, who distorted the facts about the position of Soviet workers and opposed establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In an article appearing in the A.F.L.'s organ, *American Federationist*, in February 1924, A.F.L. president Samuel Gompers stated: "The American Federation of Labor is not justified in taking any action which could be considered as an assistance to, or approval of, the Soviet Government of Russia...."<sup>1</sup>

At the A.F.L. convention in 1924, the delegates from the International Molders Union introduced a resolution calling for the establishment of trade relations with Soviet Russia and a halt to the hostile propaganda against it. However, Samuel Gompers and Matthew Woll raised enough opposition to the resolution to prevent its passing.

But the economic blockade of the U.S.S.R. did not work. The Soviet Union successfully developed trade with many countries, and some American companies concluded trade agreements with the Soviet Government despite U.S. Government opposition. The General Electric Company extended a \$20 million six-year credit to the Soviet Union for the purchase of electrical equipment. The Soviet Government concluded a \$30 million contract with Henry Ford for the purchase of automobiles and tractors.<sup>2</sup> Between 1926 and 1928, American firms bought large quantities of oil from the U.S.S.R., and some companies sent specialists to the Soviet Union to help in the construction of large industrial projects. Colonel Cooper, President of the Hugh Cooper and Co., for example, took part in the building of the Dnieper hydroelectric power station and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor by the Soviet Government.

The growing economic might of the U.S.S.R., the mass movement in its defense, and the economic interests of various circles within the American bourgeoisie all tended to undermine the foundations of the U.S. Government's policy of non-recognition.

Thus the struggle of the American working class during the

<sup>1</sup> *American Federationist*, February 1924, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Republic*, August 14, 1929, p. 327.

years of the partial stabilization of capitalism assumed various forms, including strikes in certain industries, vigorous actions in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, and demands calling for the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. On the whole, however, it was a period of relative decline for the American labor movement.

The main reason for the decline was the industrial boom, which was attended by substantial production growth in a number of key industries and higher wages for certain categories of workers, primarily skilled workers.

Another factor was the assault the bourgeoisie launched against labor unions. In 1925, taking advantage of the favorable economic situation, the President of the National Association of Manufacturers, John E. Ejerston, called for an extensive campaign against the trade unions, declaring that they were hampering the realization of the principles of "free competition" and private enterprise. Employer organizations sprang up all over the country for the express purpose of liquidating the unions and establishing the open shop. Fifty such organizations were created in New York, 20 in Connecticut, 18 in Massachusetts, 46 in Illinois, 17 in Ohio, 23 in Michigan, etc.

Meetings and conferences of businessmen held in San Francisco, Portland, San Antonio, Kansas City, San Diego, Detroit, Dallas and other cities discussed matters relating to the fight against the labor unions. At a conference in Kansas City (April 1925) it was reported that from 60 to 100 percent of the employees in the various companies operating in that city remained outside the unions. The conference called on employers to do away with union organizations completely and to abrogate all collective agreements. An anti-union conference held in Detroit in May 1926 passed a resolution stating that employers should deal directly with their employees either as individuals or as groups but not through any unions affiliated to the A.F.L.

The monopolies encouraged the creation of company unions, the basic aim of which was to establish "friendly cooperation" between workers and employers. These unions, in which both the management and employees were represented, were under the complete control of the employers



and had no decision-making right in matters relating to the life and labor of the workers. Even the general meetings in these unions were held with the permission of the management and under its supervision. Each company union was connected only with the given company and had no right to join with others to create a national center. Essentially, they were designed to help the employers.

In the 1920s many company unions were established in the steel, coal, clothing, oil, lumber, electrical engineering, railroad and other industries. Compared with 1919, when a total of only 400,000 workers belonged to company unions, 1,548,000 workers belonged to 869 company unions at the plants of 399 companies in 1928.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the monopolies' offensive, trade union membership dropped considerably—from about 5,048,000 in 1920 to 3,461,000 in 1929.<sup>2</sup>

The drive against the labor unions was to no small extent abetted by the conciliatory policy of the reformist labor leaders who often agreed to unjustified concessions and sought to establish "good relations" with employers at the expense of the interests of the majority of workers. These leaders gave access to their unions only to highly paid skilled workers by means of establishing high initiation fees and membership dues. On the whole, they strove to turn their unions into organizations of "class collaboration".

Many A.F.L. and Railroad Brotherhood leaders regarded the unions as their personal domain and a source of personal profit. They received salaries running into the tens of thousands of dollars, built themselves luxurious homes, misappropriated union funds, etc.

A.F.L. conventions adopted resolutions promoting the ideas of "cooperation between labor and capital". The 1925 convention, for example, gave its stamp of approval to so-called industrial democracy, that is, a policy of class collaboration.

After Samuel Gompers' death in 1924, his policy of class

<sup>1</sup> John R. Commons, Don D. Lescohier, and Elizabeth Brandeis, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932*, Vol. III, New York, 1935, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 97, 98.

collaboration was continued by William Green, his successor as president of the A.F.L. and former secretary-treasurer of the United Mine Workers. In a speech at Harvard University on March 30, 1925, Green said that modern trade unionism was addressing itself to the "problems of industrial cooperation and understanding" and that industrial conflicts were "directly traceable to a flagrant disregard or denial of the common rights of either employers or employees".<sup>1</sup>

The policy of class collaboration was most clearly manifested in the A.F.L. leadership's endorsement of a union-management cooperation scheme called the Baltimore-Ohio Plan. In return for union recognition and collective bargaining rights, unions had to cooperate with the employers in speeding up production, supplying workers when needed, etc.

The A.F.L. convention of 1925 urged labor unions to adopt the B-O Plan as a means of carrying out what the reactionary labor leaders called the "higher strategy of labor"—aimed at establishing cooperation between workers and employers. In addition to giving this plan their blessing, the leaders of the A.F.L. and Railroad Brotherhoods recommended that the capitalist system of money circulation be used to enrich the workers through the establishment of labor banks. Bourgeois economist Thomas N. Carver attempted to provide theoretical grounds for this plan. He claimed that by putting their savings in these banks and buying company shares workers would increase their incomes and gradually "become capitalists". The idea was also backed by the U.S. Department of Labor.<sup>2</sup>



7. William Green, President of the A.F.L. from 1924 to 1952

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1925, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, May 1925, p. 3.

The first labor bank was established in 1920 in Cleveland by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Soon similar banks cropped up in other cities. In 1926 there were 36 of them with total resources of \$126 million.<sup>1</sup>

In the end, however, the financial scheme of the reformist union leaders failed, showing the insolvency of the claims made by Carver and other bourgeois economists that a "revolution" in income distribution had been accomplished. In existence for only a few years, the whole edifice of labor banking collapsed.

The "trade union capitalism" connected with the labor banks and cultivated by reformist trade union leaders had adverse consequences for the development of the labor movement: not only did it hurt the unions financially, jeopardizing funds sorely needed for such purposes as strike relief and aid to the unemployed, but it diverted the attention of workers from the need to struggle for their economic and political interests.

In their drive against the labor movement, the ruling circles also made wide use of compulsory arbitration and court injunctions to prevent strikes. The Sherman Act, passed in 1890 to curb the monopolies, was often applied against labor unions. Approximately 18 percent of all the court cases under the Sherman Act were against labor unions or union members. According to A.F.L. data, between 1918 and 1928, federal and state courts alone (that is, not counting rulings by municipal and county courts) issued 389 strike injunctions.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Labor ran a conciliation service whose main job was to promote the policy of class collaboration between workers and employers, help settle industrial disputes and avert or terminate strikes. From 1922 through 1927, 2,558 cases involving a total of 2.8 million persons were referred to the conciliation service, and in 87 percent of the cases strikes were averted.<sup>3</sup>

In the railroad industry, after the general strike of 1922 the ruling circles of America set themselves the goal of introducing such changes in legislation as would eliminate strikes by

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, December 1929, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America. A History*, New York, 1960, p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> H. G. Hayes, *Our Economic System*, Vol. II, New York, 1928, p. 203.

railroad workers. In a message to Congress on December 6, 1923, President Coolidge said that the settlement of railroad labor disputes was a matter of grave public concern. If a substantial agreement could be reached among the groups interested there should be no hesitation in enacting such an agreement into law.<sup>1</sup>

On May 20, 1926, after lengthy negotiations between the Railway Labor Executives' Association and representatives of 20 railroad workers' unions, Congress passed the Railway Labor Act (the Watson-Parker Law), setting forth the procedure for settling railway disputes. Article 1 of the law obliged carriers and their employees to exert every reasonable effort to make and maintain agreements with respect to wage rates, rules and conditions of work, and to settle all disputes arising either in connection with the application of such agreements or for other reasons, in the interests of avoiding any interruption in interstate commerce or in the work of any carrier due to a dispute between a carrier and its employees.

Any dispute had to be discussed at a meeting of employer and employee representatives not later than 10 days after it arose. The law provided for a board of mediation composed of five members, each with a salary of \$12,000 per year, to be appointed by the U.S. President with the consent of the Senate. The function of the board was to mediate disputes, interpret agreements, etc. Provision was also made for the creation of an arbitration board. If negotiations, mediation and arbitration with the help of these bodies failed to settle a dispute and a strike became imminent, the law provided for the appointment of an emergency board to investigate and make recommendations. During its investigation and for 30 days, until the board submitted its report to the President, no changes could be made in the conditions leading to the dispute.

The Watson-Parker Law thus provided for a tangle of mediation, arbitration and bureaucratic delay for the purpose of preventing strikes.

It was characteristic that not a single worker sat on the Board of Mediation appointed by President Coolidge in 1926. The

<sup>1</sup> House Reports, 69th Congress, 1st Session, Public, Vol. I, Washington, 1926, Report No. 328, p. 2.



board included lawyers and economists, E. P. Morrow, the former Governor of Kentucky who had suppressed a miners' strike with the help of troops and police, and Carl Williams, a big businessman from Massachusetts, famous for his anti-labor attitude.<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the A.F.L. and Railroad Brotherhoods hailed the Watson-Parker Law. A.F.L. president William Green said that it was a constructive contribution to the development of employer-employee cooperation, for it embodied the principle of "cooperation growing out of mutuality of interests and welfare".<sup>2</sup>

In fact, however, the law stimulated the growth of company unions, introduced compulsory arbitration, virtually illegalized strikes on the railroads, increased the tendencies toward class collaboration, and served as an instrument for the railroad companies to rake in additional profits.

The industrial boom of the twenties was accompanied by a surging wave of bourgeois propaganda. A steady stream of newspaper and magazine articles sowed the illusion of "prosperity". America, they said, had become the world banker and the world manufacturer, and the peoples of Europe and other continents were coming cap in hand to Uncle Sam. They gave regular reports on the growth of the national income and increases in production and consumption. Numerous books were written about the advent of the Golden Age of American capitalism.

The primary aim of this propaganda was to weaken the influence of the socialist revolution in Russia on the minds of Americans and to prevent the penetration of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism into the ranks of the working class. Many statesmen, politicians and reformist labor leaders worked toward this end in word and action.

American bourgeois ideology was not something homogeneous or monolithic; it was an eclectic combination of the most diverse ideas and theories. This feature was pointed out by many writers. Charles F. Thwing said this in a book called *The American Society*: "The American mind is confused.... Principles, the original foundations on which men base thinking, are

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Watson-Parker Law*, Chicago, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *American Federationist*, Vol. 33, No. 6, June 1926, p. 659.

lacking."<sup>1</sup> But on the whole, the sundry political, legal, ethical, aesthetic and philosophical views and trends combined in bourgeois ideology did have certain common features always present in that they all boosted the bourgeois system, eulogized individualism, stimulated dreams of enrichment and preached American superiority.

All this was reflected in the ideas of "one hundred percent Americanism" which were spread day in and day out by the mass media. As some politicians and ideologists saw it, the main features of the "one hundred percent American" were individualism, enterprise, loyalty to the existing system, and active participation in the fight against the trade unions, strikes, "Reds", etc., with individualism being first and foremost. "No survey of America today could be complete without a careful consideration of the individualistic spirit.... Individualism is sometimes said to be a typical American quality or tradition," wrote E. Haldeman-Julius.<sup>2</sup> It was no accident that, in characterizing the "average American", the French publicist Lucien Lehman said: "The American is an egoist.... In America, egoism is no longer an individual characteristic; it has become a national virtue."<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Hoover became one of the most prominent spokesmen for individualism and "Americanism" in the 1920s. He distinguished American individualism from the individualism of other countries, for American individualism, he said, embraced the ideal of "an equality of opportunity", stimulated progress, and rather than dividing people into classes and parties assumed that all citizens would be "good Americans". The social system in America, he maintained, was entirely different from that in other countries; it was neither capitalist nor socialist, but rather a system of "progressive individualism". Calling it the bulwark of human civilization, he called on Americans to strengthen individualism and all the institutions based on it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles F. Thwing, *American Society. Interpretations of Educational and Other Forces*, New York, 1931, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> E. Haldeman-Julius, *The Big American Parade*, Boston, 1929, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Lucien Lehman, *The American Illusion*, New York 1931, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism*, New York, 1922, pp. 8-9, 63.

Apologists for capitalism saw in the ideas of individualism a force to counter the ideas of collectivism and the growing revolutionary solidarity of the masses. Prosperity was attributed to individualism as one of the primary characteristics of "Americanism", the ideal personification of which was the automobile king, Henry Ford.

It must be stressed at this point that the whole concept of "Americanism" expressed the interests of the dominant class. The propaganda promoting it pursued the aim of countering the Marxist theory of classes and class struggle with the ideas of class cooperation and nationalism. In effect, it was directed against the labor movement, Negroes and immigrants. The influence of the ideology of "Americanism" was felt in the trade unions and other labor organizations as it tended to cultivate in the workers a sense of devotion to the capitalist "free enterprise" system. Remarking on the conservatism of workingmen, Peter Odegard observed in his book, *The American Public Mind*: "Most workers are incipient capitalists. The belief that success in America is the result of individual effort has been drilled into them by the School, the Church, and the Press; and anything which smacks of class consciousness is frowned upon as anti-American."<sup>1</sup>

Bourgeois philosophy, represented by various trends (pragmatism, instrumentalism, neorealism, personalism, neo-Thomism, neo-Kantianism and others) also exercised considerable influence on American workers, especially the labor aristocracy and officials of reformist trade unions. Its main characteristics were eulogy of the capitalist system and bourgeois democracy on the one hand and antagonism toward the revolutionary workers' movement and ideas of Marxism-Leninism on the other.

Pragmatism (Charles S. Pierce, William James, John Dewey) was the most widespread and influential philosophy in the United States in the 1920s. It provided a theoretical substantiation of business practices and encouraged individualism and "Americanism". Its influence extended to such areas as culture, education, ethics, art and science.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Odegard, *The American Public Mind*, London-New York, 1931, p. 151.

John Dewey, a prolific writer, especially in the 1920s, was the main exponent of pragmatism. Among his major works during that period were *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1930), *Experience and Nature* (1925), and *The Quest for Certainty* (1929). Dewey devoted a great deal of attention to applying the principle of pragmatism to problems of logic, ethics and education. He claimed his theory to be a "reconstruction" of philosophy and criticized the old philosophical systems for being divorced from life and practice. His goal was to develop a "practical philosophy" with a view to arming the American bourgeoisie ideologically in its endeavor to suppress the labor movement.

Historian Henry Steele Commager said that Dewey more than any other modern philosopher put philosophy at the service of society, because, in his words, "practical, democratic, individualistic, opportunistic, spontaneous, hopeful, pragmatism was wonderfully adapted to the temperament of the average American".<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Kant, Hume, Royce and other philosophers who operated with abstract ontological and epistemological categories far removed from life, Dewey proclaimed that philosophy should become an instrument for the average American in his daily life. Its practicality and apparent "democratic nature" accounted for the great influence of pragmatism in the United States, where the sense of individualism, practicality and business was very strong. Dewey developed a pragmatic conception of truth according to which truth is what is useful and leads to success. The criterion of truth is the utility of the idea. In contrast to the Marxist theory of class struggle, Dewey advanced the theory of "social cooperation". In his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* he wrote: "Capital and labor cannot 'really' conflict because each is an organic necessity to the other, and both to the organized community as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

One of the means of achieving social harmony, in his view,

<sup>1</sup> Henry S. Commager, *The American Mind. An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s*, London, 1950, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Boston, 1949, p. 191.



was the bourgeois state. Dewey depicted the state as the supreme arbiter between different sections of society.

It must be noted that within the American working class this philosophy had its social roots primarily in the labor aristocracy—the privileged segment of highly paid workers and reformist labor union leaders.

No small role in discouraging strikes and encouraging class cooperation was played by church organizations, many of which conducted ideological work among the working people in an effort to divert them from the class struggle. Guided in their activity by special “social” programs, American clergymen propagated the ideas that capitalism was eternal and private property sacred. In their effort to influence the labor movement, the clergy exploited the traditional religious sectarianism that divided workers of the Catholic, Protestant and other faiths. The most effective propaganda among working people was that of the Catholic Church, which carried out its activities through its Social Section of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

Underlying the “social work” of the Roman Catholic Church were the ideas of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. That document outlined a program of struggle against the influence of socialism in the labor movement. It directed the Church to create Catholic organizations which would undermine the labor movement from within and cripple the revolutionary initiative of the masses by preaching Christian humility and love for one’s enemies.

In carrying out this program in the twenties, the Catholic leaders in America concluded that the main mission of their organizations was to achieve “class cooperation”. Applying the propositions of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* to American conditions, John Ryan, the director of the Social Action Section, proclaimed in a sermon to Catholic workers in Detroit in October 1926 that a class society was eternal because each of the two classes was indispensable to the other. On this basis, he advocated the practice of “mutual agreement” between workers and employers.

The social preachings of Catholicism among the workers were to no small extent facilitated by encouragement from the A.F.L. leadership. A.F.L. president William Green stated:

“The American labor movement believes in religion and in the church.”<sup>1</sup>

Many A.F.L. leaders were devout Catholics and willingly allowed the Catholic clergy to promote among the workers their program of social reconstruction based on the idea of creating “employer-employee associations”. Due to the constant pressure of the social teaching of the Church many Catholic workers succumbed to the propaganda of class peace.

The struggle against strikes was a special topic at a conference of Gastonia church leaders on April 11, 1929. Their aim was to divert the workers’ attention from the strike, drawing it to problems of religion. Priests talked with workers at meetings, in the church and in their homes in an effort to stop the strike, which they saw as a “disorder”.

The government itself took part in the anti-strike drive by deporting immigrant workers who were active in the left wing of the trade union movement. Testifying before the congressional Immigration and Naturalization Commission, Communists Engdahl, Johnson and Ford brought out the fact that deportation served as a means of struggle against the labor movement.

Thus, the government and the big corporations employed a variety of means to hamper the labor movement, including compulsory arbitration, the courts, the police, the mass media and the Church. All this had an adverse effect on the character, level and scope of the strike effort and the labor movement as a whole. Also affected by the economic and political situation in the country were the Socialist and the Communist parties.

As a result of the split in 1919, the left wing of the Socialist Party withdrew to found the Communist Party. This was an irreparable blow to the Socialist Party, which entered a period of prolonged crisis. Its former influence on the labor movement was lost forever, and its position in the political life of the country declined sharply while its isolation from the masses increased.

The new situation urgently demanded of the Party leaders

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion. A Symposium of Labor Leaders Throughout the World*, New York, 1929, p. 108.

an entirely different approach to evaluating historical events and elaborating working-class strategy and tactics. Instead of broadening their contacts with the labor movement, actively supporting the strike effort and other economic and political actions of the proletariat, and working in cooperation with all democratic forces in the country, they continued along the road of sectarianism, reformism and rejection of the class struggle. The result was self-isolation and increased inner factional strife. The latter was a disease which inexorably weakened the Party. That is why in the period 1924-1929 the Party leaders concentrated their efforts basically on trying to preserve the Party as an independent political organization. Nonetheless, Party membership steadily declined during the postwar decade, dwindling from 104,000 in 1919 to barely 7,000 by 1929.

In many states, Socialist Party organizations disappeared completely. New York, Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and Reading (Pennsylvania) remained about their only islands of influence. The Socialists maintained ties with the trade unions in the states of Pennsylvania and New York, where they could count on the traditional support of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Fur Workers Union (A.F.L.) and a few other unions whose leaders called themselves Socialists. James Maurer, a member of the S.P. National Executive Committee for 16 years until 1928, was president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor (A.F.L.); Socialist James D. Graham was elected in 1929 president of the Montana Federation of Labor; and J. Henry Stump headed the united city labor council of Reading.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the Socialist Party was made up of non-proletarian middle class and intellectual elements.<sup>2</sup>

Election campaigning continued to be the main direction of the Socialists' activities. Prior to 1927, the Socialist Party won a number of elective offices in Wisconsin only: Victor Berger was

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader and American Appeal*, April 28, 1928; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, New York, 1955, pp. 185, 188; *Socialism and American Life*, ed. by D. D. Egbert and S. Persons, Vol. 1, Princeton, 1952, pp. 308-10, 369.

<sup>2</sup> *New Leader*, January 19, 1929.

elected in 1924 and again in 1926 to the House of Representatives; ten Socialists were elected to the state legislature; Socialists held seats in the Milwaukee city council, and Daniel W. Hoan, member of the S.P. Executive Committee, was mayor of Milwaukee from 1924 to 1929. In Reading, Pennsylvania, the support of local trade unions assured the Socialists some success in the 1927 municipal elections. J. Henry Stump became mayor of Reading (population 120,000) and J. H. Maurer and John W. Snyder won seats in the city council. By the end of 1929, Socialists occupied all the elective seats in the council. Five S. P. candidates won seats in the Pennsylvania state legislature.

In 1927, Socialist Frances Perkins was elected president of the city council of Buffalo, New York.

In the larger industrial states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio), the S.P.'s influence remained insignificant. The situation as a whole was revealed in the results of the 1928 presidential election. S.P. candidate Norman Thomas received a little over 267,000 votes (0.73 percent), as compared to the 920,000 votes (3.5 percent) cast for Eugene Debs in 1920.<sup>1</sup>

The Party's political activity was limited mainly to election campaigning. Very little printed material was published. Prior to World War I, the Party had about 100 regular publications in the United States, but in 1926, there were less than 30, with only two dailies.<sup>2</sup>

The S.P. leadership based its assessment of the country's "prosperity" primarily on its stability and duration. However, the pressure of facts finally induced the Socialists to admit, in an Address by the National Executive Committee on January 15, 1928, that the American economic system was on the verge of severe trials. There were several million unemployed in the country, and their numbers were increasing. The threat of poverty haunted millions of workers. Hundreds of thousands of farmers faced an extremely dismal future; never had their hopes for a decent living seemed so unattainable. Masses of agricultural workers were undergoing indescribable privation. At the same time, the financial and industrial magnates were

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, February 23, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> *Current History*, August, 1926, p. 753.



wallowing in torrents of ever-growing dividends.<sup>1</sup> This assessment of the "era of prosperity" was included in the Socialist Party's election platform, adopted at its 16th convention in April 1928.<sup>2</sup> The Socialists came out in defense of civil liberties, for democratization of the electoral system, release of political prisoners, the equality of Negroes, the repeal of anti-labor legislation, and much more. However, these demands were of a declamatory nature. In practice, the Socialists did not struggle for their implementation.

As for the strike movement, the Party's connection with it was very limited and sporadic.

The positive actions of the Socialist Party in those years were all too few. They would include socialist participation in the work of the American Civil Liberties Union, the campaign to free Tom Mooney and Warren Billings, and the organization of mass May Day meetings and demonstrations in 1928 and 1929 in New York at which the main slogans were for social and political rights, peace and disarmament. The S.P. was also one of the organizers of the one-day strike in New York city in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti. The strike was held on August 9, 1927 and involved 400,000 workers.

These were the most significant, and perhaps the only, instances of the Party's participation in mass actions of the working class and the democratic movement.

The problem was more than a lack of influence or small membership; the limitations and decline of the American socialist movement in the 1920s were directly linked with the passivity and opportunism of its leaders. Morris Hillquit wrote in 1929 with self-exposing frankness that apathy and uncertainty hamstrung the movement in those long, fruitless years.

In the period under consideration, the Socialist Party continued to hold a "neutral" position with respect to the trade unions. Its leaders waged no real struggle against the reactionary leadership of the A.F.L.; instead they opposed the Communist Party which was at the helm of the left wing in the labor movement. As in preceding years, all proposals by the Communist Party for a united front were rejected. In August

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, January 21, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, Vol. 10, New York, 1929, pp. 148-49.

1926, the Executive Committee of the S.P. recommended that its local organizations avoid any contact with the Communists.

As before, the American Socialists refused to regard the Negro question as an independent national problem. A resolution of the 15th convention of the S.P. (1926) stated that this question could be solved only under socialism.

On the whole, the Socialist Party actually stood aloof from the struggle for social and economic rights of the working people in the 1920s, and was losing mass support. Even such a popular leader as Eugene Debs could not breathe life into it and pull it out of the crisis. After his release from prison in late 1921, he was no longer in any condition to play an active role in Party work. The ailing leader could only watch the erosion of the Party to which he had devoted a quarter century of his life. On October 20, 1926, Debs died.

After his death, Victor Berger headed the Party, and together with Hillquit and others of the Old Guard on the National Executive Committee determined the road along which the Party of American Socialists was to travel. After Berger's death in August 1929, the Party was headed by Hillquit. Both leaders pursued an opportunist policy and preached a so-called democratic socialism.

As the membership and influence of the Socialist Party declined, it became increasingly a conservative organization permeated with reformist ideas. This found clear expression in its official documents. The Declaration of Principles adopted by an S.P. convention in 1924 omitted the propositions of the 1920 Declaration on the vanguard role of the working class and the need to nationalize the big landholdings and capitalist agricultural enterprises.<sup>1</sup>

From the convention rostrum Berger tried to convince the bourgeois classes of the "respectability" of the Socialist Party, "the only true reform party in existence".<sup>2</sup> "I do not want any violent convulsions," he said in a speech on January 18, 1927. "I want to see a socialist commonwealth grow out of the

<sup>1</sup> *The American Labor Year Book*, 1921-1922, Vol. 4, New York, pp. 394-95, 1925, Vol. 6, pp. 134-35.

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Record*, April 4 to April 20, 1928, Washington, 1928, p. 6907.

present economic and political conditions by natural evolution."<sup>1</sup>

During the "era of prosperity", those in the Socialist Party who preached the theory of American exceptionalism were increasingly vociferous. They claimed that the class struggle in the United States was on the wane. In one of his public speeches, Norman Thomas maintained that the lines of the class struggle were becoming obscure. Abraham Cahan and Emil Seidel referred to the lack of class consciousness among American workers. Accepting Morris Hillquit's proposal, a Socialist Party convention in April 1928 struck from the Party constitution the provision that recognition of the class struggle was mandatory for Party membership. The new constitution permitted group membership, providing for affiliation of labor, fraternal and other sympathetic organizations. Taking the British Labor Party as a model, the American Socialist leaders hoped to turn the S.P. into a mass organization. The new constitution opened wide the door to petty-bourgeois fellow travellers and reformists who had little in common with socialism.

The political evolution of the Socialist Party in the 1920s was clearly reflected in its attitude toward the Soviet Union. In the early postwar years, its assessment of the Russian revolution was, on the whole, positive and sympathetic. For example, the 1923 Socialist convention in New York passed a resolution which said that the victory of the revolution in Russia would forever remain a glorious page in the long history of the working-class struggle. In the succeeding years, although the Party continued to favor the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviet Union, its leadership gradually became imbued with anti-Soviet sentiments.<sup>2</sup>

This, then, was the sad state the S.P. was to come to in 1929. Weakened and to a large extent isolated from the democratic movement, hamstrung by the inertness and opportunism of its leaders, it ended up on the sidelines of the social struggles waged by the American working people. This unavoidably had

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, January 7 to January 26, 1927, Washington, 1927, p. 1881.

<sup>2</sup> *New Leader*, April 2, 1927, February 4, 1928.

an effect on the labor movement and baneful consequences for the Party itself.

During the period of the partial stabilization of capitalism, the Workers Party of America travelled a complex and difficult road. It had to overcome the errors of "leftism", dogmatism and sectarianism and the consequences of political crisis. But despite all this the Party gradually strengthened its ties with the masses of working people.

It was active in strikes in the coal, textile, clothing and other industries, in the course of which new and progressive trade unions emerged which were to play a positive role in the struggle against the monopoly drive against the workers' economic positions. Under the Party's influence, the civil liberties movement intensified, especially during the campaign in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti. The Party strongly advocated establishing diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R.

The Party was very active in the area of political education among workers. In October 1923, a Workers School was organized in New York, offering courses in the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism and the strategy and tactics of the class struggle. Workers schools were also set up in Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit, with branches in Paterson, Passaic and Jersey City. The *Daily Worker*, which became the Party's chief organ, was founded in 1924, its first issue coming out on January 13 of that year. Other publications included the *Worker's Monthly* and the *Working Woman* magazine. In 1925, 27 communist newspapers and magazines were published in the United States with a total monthly circulation of 177,000 copies. The *New Masses*, a magazine designed for intellectuals, was founded in 1926.

With the aim of publishing the classics of Marxism-Leninism as well as works by progressive historians, philosophers and economists, the International Publishers was founded in 1924. In 1927, Communists and Left-wing labor organizers set up the Labor Research Association. The Association published many books, articles, pamphlets and leaflets dealing with the condition of the working masses and the struggle for their economic and political interests.

The publication of works on Marxist-Leninist theory was very valuable in fighting bourgeois ideology. Through the



efforts of the Communists and progressive publishing houses, a number of works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin were published in the 1920s, including *Capital*, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Class Struggle in France*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and "Left-wing" Communism—an Infantile Disorder.

The 1927 publication in English of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (International Publishers) was especially important for spreading Marxist philosophy in the United States and fighting pragmatism.

Articles, pamphlets and books written by Charles E. Ruthenberg, William Z. Foster, A. Wagenknecht, Israel Amter, Robert Minor, A. Trachtenberg and other Communists were directed against the illusions of "prosperity" and the theory of "American exceptionalism". They predicted that despite its present economic strength the United States would inevitably be undermined by the contradictions inherent in world capitalism and plunged into recurring deeper industrial crises.<sup>1</sup>

An important task standing before the Communists was to strengthen their Party organizationally. In its first years, the Party was built on the principle of uniting its constituent language federations. [In July 1924, it had 18 autonomous language federations, the largest of which were the federations of the Finns (6,243), Jews (1,371), Lithuanians (1,053), Russians (943) and Ukrainians (711).] The principle of language federations hampered cohesion among Party ranks in the shops, factories, cities, etc.

Taking this into account, the third convention of the Workers Party, held from December 30, 1923, through January 2, 1924, passed a resolution calling for the formation of Party shop branches.

Questions of strengthening the Party's organizational unity and raising its ideological and political level were widely discussed at the fourth convention (August 1925). That convention adopted a resolution stating that the basic task of

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *Misleaders of Labor*, TUEL, Printed in the U.S.A., 1927, p. 68.

the Party under the existing circumstances was to awaken and raise the self-awareness of the working class and to organize it for the struggle against the monopolies.

The Party structure did not meet the demands of democratic centralism; it divided its members by nationality, led to isolation from the masses, hampered Party discipline, and provided rich soil for factionalism. The language-federation structure had thus become outmoded. The convention therefore passed a resolution stating that the Party should be reorganized to meet the demands of democratic centralism. The resolution noted that the process of reorganization involved both structural changes and a further increase in the Party's political and educational activities.

An important constructive measure of the 1925 convention was the expulsion of the small group of opportunists led by L. Lore. This group opposed the idea of reorganizing the Party, rejected the principles of democratic centralism, disagreed with the Party in the analysis of the alignment of class forces, ignored the role of working farmers as allies of the proletariat in the class struggle, and wanted the Party to restrict its activity to questions of political education, i. e., to turn the Party into a mere educational organization.

After the fourth convention the Party began to reorganize on an industrial basis according to the principle of democratic centralism. Party branches were set up in factories, and street branches were organized in the cities.

In 1926, two communist branches were established at the Ford Motor plants, and the Party began publication of the *Ford Worker*, a newspaper with a monthly circulation that soon grew from 5,000 to 20,000 copies. The number of workers who actually read the paper was considerably greater. In the Michigan area, 20 communist factory newspapers with a monthly total circulation of 60,000 were published at a number of enterprises.

However, there were several serious shortcomings in the work of the Party. Reorganization on the industrial principle proceeded slowly. Most of the Party members belonged to street rather than shop branches, which hindered their working directly with the industrial proletariat. There was a large turnover in Party membership. From December 1925

through December 1927, the Party gained 6,000 new members but lost just as many.

After the reorganization, Party membership dropped considerably—from 16,325 in 1925 to 9,642 in 1929. The Young Communist League sponsored by the Party numbered 2,500 members in 1929.<sup>1</sup> The attrition was due primarily to the departure of members who did not agree with the reorganization on a shop and street branch basis. Inner factional strife did great damage, diverting the Party's energies away from carrying out broad educational and organizational programs and interfering with its influence among the masses of workers. Charles Ruthenberg brought this out in July 1926 when he wrote that the factional fight did serious damage to the Party's work among the masses and its efforts to establish ideological and organizational unity.

The fifth convention of the Workers Party (August 31–September 7, 1927) devoted a great deal of time to the problem of resolving the factional struggle. A resolution was finally adopted banning factional groups and instructing the Party leadership to take all necessary steps to strengthen Party unity.

The convention also laid great stress on work among trade unionists. Speaking on this subject, William Foster noted that in recent years attacks on the left wing of the labor movement by reactionary forces had increased significantly. The Party's main tasks in the labor unions, therefore, were to strengthen the positions of the left wing, organize unorganized workers and create mass industrial unions. He noted, however, that there were signs of sectarian tendencies in the Party: some Communists considered it impossible to work in the labor unions due to the strong resistance of the labor union bureaucracy. He called on Party members to repudiate such sentiments and to intensify their work within the labor unions.

The Fifth Convention also adopted a resolution to move the Party headquarters from Chicago to New York.

In 1928, a sharp struggle developed against the Trotskyite faction headed by James M. Cannon, Max Schachtman and M. Abern. Though the group was not large in numbers, it was

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 261.

doing great damage to the Party. Cannon and his followers opposed the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern (1928), advocated rejection of the united front, and demanded that work within the reformist trade unions be halted as "futile". Thus they were trying to push the Party into isolation from the masses. The Trotskyites made fierce attacks against the leadership and sought to disorganize the ranks of the Party. In October 1928, Cannon and his supporters were expelled from the Party as splitters and disrupters.

At the sixth convention of the Party in March 1929, several important decisions were made to further strengthen ideological and organizational unity. The convention was attended by 104 delegates, 72 of whom were industrial workers.<sup>1</sup> William E. Weinstone gave a report on the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, noting the great importance of its decisions and its program of action to resist the growing war danger, to raise the ideological and political level of the work of Communist parties, and to expose the Trotskyites and right opportunists. This program, he said, was a proper guide to the working class of the United States and the Communist Party in the complex development of world events. It clearly formulated the tasks of the international communist movement.<sup>2</sup>

In his organizational report, Jack Stachel stated that the Party had about 14,000 members, 9,300 of whom paid their dues regularly. Many Communists could not pay dues regularly because of unemployment. The report noted that although membership had dropped in comparison with 1925 (prior to the reorganization), the Communists had become more active and the work of Party organizations had intensified.

Otto Huiswood spoke about the need to step up Party work among Negro workers, noting that many Party organizations gave too little attention to drawing Negro workers into the Party and the trade unions and to the struggle for Negro civil rights. The American Negro Labor Congress, founded back in 1925, was a small organization composed basically of Negro intellectuals.

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, March 7, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



A letter from the Executive Committee of the Comintern to the convention pointed out that the Workers Party of America had not yet overcome sectarian limitations and had not strengthened its ties with the masses. Factional struggle was still damaging the work of the Party, it noted, and must be eliminated. "Existing factions must be absolutely and completely abolished," the letter said. "The faction struggle must unconditionally be halted."<sup>1</sup>

The letter further noted that in order for the Party to become a mass party it must expand its ties with the workers, particularly in key industries, and focus its attention on the day-to-day needs of the working people, taking into account the historical prospects of the class struggle on the basis of a scientific analysis of the general crisis of capitalism.

At the sixth convention, the Party's name was changed to the Communist Party of the United States, and a new Central Committee was elected.

After the sixth convention, a group of right factionists—Jay Lovestone, John Pepper, Ben Gitlow, Bertram Wolfe, Herbert Zam and others—heightened their attacks on the Party leadership and its program, defying the convention's decisions. They managed to seize a number of important Party posts. After the death of Charles Ruthenberg (March 2, 1927), Jay Lovestone had become Secretary General of the Party. Lovestone and Pepper came out in opposition to the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern which had stressed that the partial stabilization of capitalism was coming to an end and a period of aggravated capitalist contradictions and more intense class struggle was approaching.

Counter to this analysis, the Lovestone group upheld the idea that American capitalism was exceptionally strong and stable, ignored its contradictions, and denied the inevitability of exacerbated class struggle. Assessing the results of the 1928 presidential election, John Pepper wrote in the *Daily Worker* that it testified to the victory of American capitalism and the lack of prospect for Communist Party growth. The theses which the right factionists submitted to the sixth convention of

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, March 4, 1929, p. 3.

the Party said that a depression would not lead to a new crisis but would be the springboard to new "prosperity". Lovestone and his followers maintained that American capitalism was approaching its "Victorian Age". They contended that capitalism in the United States, unlike capitalism in other countries, was sound at heart and capable of preventing economic crises, unemployment, and so on.

The essence of the right opportunist views was aptly characterized by the Comintern in an "Address to the C.P.U.S.A.": "A crisis of capitalism, but not of American capitalism; a swing of the masses to the left, but not in America; the necessity of stepping up the fight against reformism, but not in the U.S.A.; the necessity of struggling with the Right danger, but not in the American Communist Party."<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical propositions of the rightists would have led in practice to a denial of the class struggle, a weakening of the Party's work among the masses and thus the isolation and ultimate collapse of the Party. Taken to its logical conclusion, the thinking of the right opportunists was: If there can be no class struggle in the United States, then the Communist Party has no reason to exist. Acting as splitters Lovestone and his group did not comply with Party decisions and deliberately intensified their factional activities with the aim of destroying the Party. The majority in the Party, however, united around William Z. Foster, and in June 1929, Lovestone, Pepper, Gitlow, Wolfe, Zam and their followers were expelled from the Party.

The Central Committee's statement on the expulsion noted that the duty of the Party was to maintain unity in its ranks in accord with the political line of the Communist International.

The emergence of right opportunism and revisionism in the American Communist Party in the 1920s was not happenstance. Revisionism had deep social and class roots in the economics and politics of American imperialism. The relatively high economic activity in the twenties, the expansion of American capital into Europe, Asia and Latin America, and the existence of a sizable labor aristocracy were among the factors that promoted the rise of right opportunism and revisionism in

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 20, 1929.

the United States. One of the important social roots of revisionism was the pressure of the prevailing bourgeois ideology on the working class and its Party. It must be remembered that in a capitalist society there are broad segments of the petty bourgeoisie whose members not only come in contact with the proletariat but actually penetrate into its ranks. "It is quite natural," wrote Lenin, "that the petty-bourgeois world outlook should again and again crop up in the ranks of the broad workers' parties."<sup>1</sup> Great effort was required of the experienced, militant Party leaders and the rank and file to overcome opportunist trends and to pursue a consistent policy.

An important task of the American Communists was to expose bourgeois ideology and revisionism, to spread Marxism-Leninism and creatively to apply Marxist-Leninist theory to the concrete conditions of the labor movement in the United States.

The Party's educational work, its reorganization and its struggle against various anti-Party trends and groups during the partial stabilization of capitalism were all important prerequisites to improving the work of the Party during the economic crisis of 1929-1933, and after.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 39.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE A.F.L. POLICIES ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

The Negro question, which remained unresolved after the Civil War (1861-1865), undeniably had an impact on the labor movement. As before, the Negro population was deprived of civil rights and subjected to discrimination. Discontent grew among the Negroes, and they persistently sought a way out of the situation. Their actions were frequently of a sharp and dramatic character. At the same time, significant social, economic and political changes were occurring in the country. As the Northeast and certain regions of the South underwent rapid industrialization, the importance of the industrial proletariat in the solution of the Negro question increased.

World War I gave especially noticeable impetus to the growth of the Negro proletariat. Reduced immigration and a simultaneous increase in demand for American goods on the world market drew masses of Negroes into industry. The Great Migration of Negroes to the North began in 1915.<sup>1</sup> Over a short period of time (1916-1918), some 500,000 Negroes migrated to the North. The end of the war did not stop this flow. In 1923, for example, another half million Negroes went North. Between 1915 and 1928, the Negro population in the North increased by 1,200,000 due to migration. The newcomers settled primarily in the large industrial centers like New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburgh. The num-

<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, New York, 1944, p. 183.



ber of Negroes living in the cities increased from 2.7 million in 1910 to 5.2 million in 1930.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 1920 census, 4,824,151 Negro men and women were gainfully employed, which represented 11.6 percent of the country's total working population.<sup>2</sup> The number increased to 5.5 million by the time of the 1930 census.

It should be noted, however, that Negroes were basically occupied in agriculture. In 1920, 67 percent of all Negro workers were employed on farms or in personal and domestic service. By 1930, the picture looked as follows: 42.5 percent in agriculture; 24.5 percent in domestic service; 13 percent in manufacturing; 6 percent in transport; 4 percent in mining; 4 percent in construction and skilled trades; 2 percent in government service; 2 percent worked as clerks; and 2 percent in the learned professions.

The migration to the North was accompanied by an increase in the number of Negro industrial workers in the South who came primarily from plantations in the Black Belt, where about 1.8 million of the 2 million Negroes occupied in agriculture were either farm laborers, sharecroppers or tenant farmers. These figures underscore the proletarian character of the Negro farming population and show the source of urban population growth in the South. Between 1910 and 1923, the Negro population grew from 52,000 to 67,000 in Atlanta, from 90,000 to 106,000 in New Orleans, and reached 77,000 in Birmingham.

Along with the proletarianization of the Negro population, a Negro bourgeoisie also took shape, arising largely due to the emergence of Black ghettos, like Harlem in New York, where it exploited the needs of the people. A study made in 1928 of 2,757 businesses owned by Negroes showed that 60 percent of them operated in the services sphere, principally groceries, barber shops, restaurants and tailoring establishments. There were 60 Negro-owned banks with assets totalling \$23 million,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James W. Ford, *The Negro Industrial Proletariat of America*, Moscow, 1928, p. 2; Elbert Lee Tatum, *The Changed Political Thought of the Negro, 1915-1940*, New York, 1951, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *American Federationist*, Vol. 35, No. 12, December 1928, p. 1452

<sup>3</sup> *Negro Workers*, p. 11.

to be sure, a mere drop in the bucket in that country of giant corporations. Negro capital in industry was nonexistent.

The social structure of the Negro population in the 1920s had thus undergone great changes. When considering the growing proletarianization of the Negroes, it should be remembered that, firstly, most Negro workers were still employed outside of industry, and secondly, the Negro industrial proletariat, in alliance with the rest of the working class, created a social force that was destined to play a decisive role in the complete emancipation of the Negroes. This put the Negro question in a new way and for the first time created objective conditions for its solution. However, the increase in the proportion of proletarians among the Negro population by no means led to equal rights for Negroes.

What awaited the Negro workers in the North? The hardest work and the lowest pay! Day after day they encountered the racial prejudices of the trade union bureaucracy and saw how the Southern form of segregation and discrimination was replaced by the more refined Northern type. But here the Negroes could see more clearly that it was the monopolies that were the chief cause of their misfortunes.

The political events of those years, above all the consequences of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, also contributed to certain shifts in the psychology of the Negro community. The Russian Revolution awakened the oppressed colonial peoples and dealt a powerful blow to the racist ideology, shattering the myth that the yellow and black races were incapable of playing an independent role in history.

The participation of 200,000 American Negroes in World War I also held important consequences for the American Negro movement. By sending them overseas to fight to "save democracy", the ruling circles unwittingly created the boldest fighters for racial equality at home. In France and other European countries Negro soldiers experienced treatment they had never dreamed of before. Blacks from both North and South learned for the first time what civil liberties were, and realized that the racism of Alabama, Mississippi, New York and Chicago was not universal.

Upon their return to the United States, Negro war veterans usually refused to settle in the South, and behaved differently

in the Northern cities. As Robert Minor, one of the leaders of the Communist Party, put it, their necks "no longer fit the lynchers' noose". This enraged the racists and moved them to even greater anti-Negro activity. In the 1920s many counties and even states were literally dominated by the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan succeeded in getting its own gubernatorial candidates elected in Oklahoma and Oregon and held absolute political power in the state of Indiana.<sup>1</sup> It had its champions in Congress as well.

In connivance with the authorities, Klan members committed acts of violence and tyranny. Everywhere—in buses, railway cars, cafes, hotels, at work—Negroes felt their unequal position.

In addition to the terror, an intense ideological campaign was conducted among the Negro people, a campaign in which the Church played no small role. The 1920s saw heightened activity throughout the United States by the Fundamentalists—conservative members of Protestant churches who vigorously defended orthodox Christianity against liberal trends which called for a "modernization" of religion in accordance with the findings of the social and natural sciences. In 1919, the activity of the American Fundamentalists was directed by the World Christian Fundamentals Association (formed in Philadelphia). With its help, religious conservatives formed Fundamentalist brotherhoods and societies.

The activities of the Fundamentalists were linked with reactionary political actions, hence they were especially active in the South where they were supported by chauvinist organizations of the Ku Klux Klan type. Religious fanatics strove to preserve the dominant position of religion in the Southern states and to keep the people, especially Negroes, from falling under the revolutionizing influence of science.

In 1925, the Southern Fundamentalists undertook a step which in their view would strengthen the position of the Church and enhance the prestige of religion in the country. For a short time, the small town of Dayton in the state of

<sup>1</sup> Samuel E. Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, New York, 1965, p. 884.

Tennessee was the center of world attention. A schoolteacher was brought to trial there for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. This was in violation of a state law prohibiting the teaching of any theory that denied the "divine creation of man". The local Fundamentalists invited the prominent political leader in the Democratic Party, William Jennings Bryan, to assist the prosecution. This "monkey trial", as it came to be known, was an example of witch hunting. It lasted three weeks. Despite a brilliant defense by Clarence Darrow, one of the country's best lawyers, the teacher, John Scopes, was found guilty and fined. However, during the trial the Fundamentalists made fools of themselves showing the public their ignorance and religious bigotry.

The ideological defeat at the Scopes trial did not shake the political positions of the Fundamentalists. The American bourgeoisie was interested in the ideological enslavement of the Negro working people and therefore in every way encouraged the efforts of religious elements to reinforce the power and authority of religion.

Employers did everything to deepen the chasm between Black and White workers, playing on the racial prejudices of the Whites and the reciprocal mistrust of the Blacks. With the help of conservative church leaders, the monopolies drew Negroes into company unions and pitted them against White workers during strikes. This sometimes resulted in tragic clashes, as, for example, the bloody rioting in Chicago in 1919 which lasted for six days<sup>1</sup> and in which 38 men were killed and more than 500 wounded. Such "race riots" took place in many industrial cities. It was a Northern version of the lynch trials still continuing in the South.

The steel strike of 1919 was perhaps the most vivid lesson of the perniciousness of racial prejudice and discrimination in the labor movement. The idea was implanted in the minds of white workers that the Negro was a born scab (strikebreaker), ready to work for any wage. Many workers swallowed the employer's prejudice whole. Often, the White worker did not want to work with a Negro or live next door to him or vote with

<sup>1</sup> Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis*, London, 1946, pp. 65-66.



or for him. He wanted nobody to think that he was as low as a Negro.<sup>1</sup> The Black worker also often fell under the influence of prejudices.

During the strike, agents of the monopolies recruited Negroes for work by means of deception and often by force. Many Negroes quit their jobs at the risk of their lives as soon as they learned that a strike was in progress. But they were in a tragic position, since they were not accepted by the trade union leadership and found themselves unwittingly fulfilling the role of strikebreakers. No one from the union leadership and strike committee, with the exception of William Foster, took any serious steps to organize the Negroes.

Whenever real steps were taken to meet the Negroes halfway, helping them to overcome the mistrust imposed upon them, they took an active part in the strike. In Cleveland, Ohio, and Wheeling, West Virginia, for example, 100 percent of the Negroes joined the union and struck. But on the whole, bourgeois propaganda kept alive the picture of Negroes as scabs and white workers as the main anti-Negro force. This was done to divert the working class away from the Negro question. Objectively, it was up to the working class to resolve it. In order to come to grips with the problem the American workers needed a clear program of struggle for Negro rights. As the first step, the Negroes had to have free access to the trade union organizations.

How, in fact, did the main labor and Negro organizations approach this problem?

The A.F.L. was then virtually the sole force in the U.S. union movement, and its leaders held an anti-Negro position. The question of discrimination against Negroes was raised at many conventions, but no solution was ever found. At the 1919 convention in Atlantic City, for example, the only action taken on the matter was to suggest that local Negro unions be established wherever national and international unions banned Negroes from membership. The resolution of the 1920 convention in Montreal was still more evasive. Over 20 unions had clauses in their charters banning Negro admission. In others, discrimination was somewhat veiled—a de facto

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, Vol. 35, No. 3, March 1928, p. 98.

exclusion despite lip-service to "equality" in the charter, the formation of segregated Negro branches, etc. Only the United Mine Workers and the Ladies Garment Workers admitted Negroes into their general organizations. Altogether, they had 11,000 Negro members. Sometimes Negroes formed independent unions as a protest against the exclusion policies of other national organizations.

Not only the industrial unions, but the executive council of the A.F.L. itself practiced discrimination. This above all explains the sharp drop in the number of the A.F.L. Negro locals: from 109 in 1919 to 38 in 1929.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of the discriminatory policies in the A.F.L., the Negro workers remained virtually unorganized. In 1929, there were only 60,000 Negroes in A.F.L. unions and 80,000 in non-A.F.L. organizations.

Thus, the A.F.L. had no program on the Negro question and not the slightest desire to organize Negroes.

The National Urban League, a Negro organization that was formed in 1911, pursued the limited objective of helping Negro migrants find jobs and adjust to urban life in the North. Created by intellectuals and liberal bourgeois elements, it was far removed from the labor movement and at best merely criticized the A.F.L.'s discriminatory policies.

Even further removed from the labor movement was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), established by Negro elite and liberal whites of the Northeast. The N.A.A.C.P. published a magazine called *Crisis*, which dealt with questions of Negro culture, literature, everyday life and religion and devoted much attention to court proceedings involving civil rights problems.

Under the impact of postwar events, the N.A.A.C.P. made several attempts to persuade the A.F.L. leadership to end discrimination in the labor unions. The best example of this was its famous open letter of 1924 to the A.F.L., containing a proposal to set up an inter-racial committee that would launch a campaign to organize Negroes.<sup>2</sup> The A.F.L. rejected it.

<sup>1</sup> *Negro Membership in American Labor Union*, New York, 1969, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Like the National Urban League, the N.A.A.C.P. showed strength only in the area of criticizing A.F.L. policy with respect to Negroes. *Crisis* frequently exposed the racial prejudices in the labor movement and criticized the A.F.L. leadership and William Green personally.

Negroes took part in many big strikes. A Negro worker involved in the famous 1926 textile workers' strike in Passaic appealed in the press: "The bosses tried all kinds of tricks to break us, but instead they united us. Fellow workers, stick together! White or colored, Italian or Polish!"<sup>1</sup> In 1926, Negro women took part in a successful strike of fig and date workers in Chicago. Negroes also actively participated side by side with white workers in the miners' strike in 1928.

Some Negro organizations and movements hampered the Negro civil liberties cause more than they helped it. This was especially true of a movement led by Marcus Garvey with his reactionary-utopian "Back to Africa" slogan.

Garvey based his program solely on racial differences, completely ignoring the important fact that Negroes could achieve full equality only by taking part in the political and class struggle, and that in that struggle white workers and working farmers were actually allies of the Negro working people. He maintained that Negroes would never be free in the United States and projected the idea of creating a Grand African Empire with its Negro upper class, army, police, etc.

Instead of linking the racial and the class liberation Garvey, in effect, called for the deportation of the multi-million Negro population to British and French colonies in Africa. Despite the great size of the movement, its basic slogans were fallacious and utopian. It was a reaction of despair arising from the deplorable position of the Negro people. Economically oppressed and subjected to various forms of social ostracism, the broad masses of the Negro population responded to Garvey's vocal and enticing appeals. But their enthusiasm was shortlived, and the illusion soon crumbled. However, the unchanging position of the Negroes left plenty of room for reactionary sectarian, chauvinistic and segregationist slogans put out from time to time by Negro intellectuals and bourgeois

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, June 19, 1926, p. 2.

elements. The Communists, therefore, condemned any such approach to solving the Negro question. Garvey's slogans were subjected to harsh criticism by the Comintern in 1928.

As for the Negro business community, it did not conceal its hostile attitude to the idea of creating trade unions. When in 1924 W.E.B. Du Bois appealed to the A.F.L. to organize Negroes, the Negro Press Association came out against labor unions. After a careful study of the question, historians Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell concluded that "toward the labor movement the Negro upper class has been generally antagonistic."<sup>1</sup>

The Negro workers, farmers, urban middle strata and bourgeoisie remained facing the unresolved problem of achieving equality in civil rights and eliminating all forms of discrimination. Thus, despite the wavering cow-to-wing before the powers-that-be, the Negro upper strata had to seek support from the labor movement and beware of being isolated from the masses. Both of these tendencies were characteristic of the leadership of the Negro community in the 1920s, but a sense of hopelessness and lack of confidence in mass struggle and the abilities of the labor movement clearly prevailed.

The role of the American working class in solving the Negro question depended to a large extent on the proper theoretical and political approach to the question by the working-class parties and their ability to organize the masses and lead them under slogans of Negro liberation.

The Socialist Party showed no interest in the Negro question either before or after World War I. It considered the oppression of Negroes to be an extreme form of the oppression of the proletariat, and therefore approached the Negro question as part of the overall problem of liberating the working class from the yoke of capital. Eugene Debs said: "We have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make special appeals to all races."<sup>2</sup> Years later, in 1936, Norman Thomas spoke of the Negro question in approximately the same vein. In his view, the question could be resolved only

<sup>1</sup> Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions*, Chapel Hill, 1939, p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, Chapel Hill, 1951, p. 19.



under socialism. Noting that some improvement in the position of Negroes could be achieved under capitalism, the Socialist leader added: "But there is no law under capitalism which will bring to white workers, or to colored, plenty, peace, freedom, security against poverty and against war. This requires a new sort of society."<sup>1</sup> There was much in the Socialist Party line that was sectarian, doctrinaire and alien to Marxism in its approach to the Negro question. This could be seen in the fact that the Socialists ignored immediate democratic goals set by the very course of events and cut themselves off from the Negro masses who were in need of special attention and were not ready for direct struggle for socialism.

At first, the Communist Party repeated the errors of Debs and De Leon in regarding the Negro question as strictly proletarian in character. But in 1921, it took steps to correct this proposition and began to formulate it as a specific question in its program.<sup>2</sup> In the stormy years of the postwar revolutionary upsurge, the Communists came to the conclusion that it was impossible to wait for socialism to liberate the Negroes, that this was a criminal abdication of social responsibility and played into the hands of those preaching a Garvey-type of nationalism. The Communist Party considered members of the Black race to be an inseparable part of the American nation and recognized the fact that they had made and were making enormous contributions in all spheres of American life.

The communist position on the Negro question was clearly set forth in Robert Minor's articles entitled "The Ten Million", which first appeared in the February and March 1924 issues of *Liberator*, were subsequently reprinted in the influential Negro newspaper, *Amsterdam News*, and received wide publicity. The publisher of that newspaper ranked the articles among the most able and comprehensive ever written on the subject. Minor formulated therein the Communist Party's basic proposals on the Negro question. Envisaged, in particular, was the organization of millions of unorganized Negro industrial wage-laborers into unions together with white workers. He

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, Vol. 43, No. 10, 1936, pp. 294-95.

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History*, New York, 1954, p. 455.

called the Negro question a "political question" that could not be resolved solely within the framework of labor's struggle, although its solution depended largely on the labor movement.

With the idea of linking the political tasks of liberating the Negro race with the immediate problems of unionizing the Negro proletariat, the Communist Party launched the American Negro Labor Congress in Chicago in 1925. The resolutions of the A.N.L.C. noted that it was imperative to heed the lessons of the postwar class clashes in which the bourgeoisie succeeded in drawing upon the vast army of unorganized Negro workers and pitting them against the whites to the great injury of both. The A.N.L.C. further condemned all efforts from whatever source to segregate Negro workers in separate unions. The objectives of the A.N.L.C. program were "to lead the struggles of the Negro workers and farmers against terrorism, lynching, mob violence, police brutality, segregation and all forms of race hatred; for equal pay for equal work; for better working conditions; for the organization of Negro workers into trade unions on the basis of complete equality".<sup>1</sup>

The A.N.L.C. set up Inter-Racial Labor Conferences in big cities to strengthen proletarian unity and maintain contact with large Negro organizations. It held a joint meeting with Chicago locals of the Ladies Garment Workers Union in May 1926, and the two organizations conducted a united drive to bring Negroes into the union. During the textile strike in Passaic, A.N.L.C. leaders came to address the strikers on several occasions. The A.N.L.C. led the defense of Negro workers against anti-labor gangs in Carteret, New Jersey, and took an active part in a number of strikes, including a plumbers' strike and a Negro women fruit packers' strike in Chicago, a Colored Motion Operators' strike in New York, and a cotton pickers' strike in California. It also engaged in educational work, organizing forums in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia to discuss problems of unifying white and Black workers.<sup>2</sup>

The most flexible organization and one that managed to overcome to some extent the barrier between the labor

<sup>1</sup> James W. Ford, *The Negro and the Democratic Front*, New York, 1938, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Ford, *The Negro Industrial Proletariat of America*, Moscow, 1928, pp. 22, 23.

movement and the mass Negro associations was the International Labor Defense, formed in 1925 at the initiative of the Communists. Its leader, William Patterson, later became a staunch fighter for Negro civil rights. The organization's activities centered around the legal and political defense of the victims of bourgeois law.

The Communist Party continued to work on programs and theoretical problems concerning Negro liberation.

In line with this decision, the Party's election platform included specific demands aimed at the "abolition of the whole system of race discrimination" and for the achievement of "full racial equality".<sup>1</sup> It called for the immediate removal of all restrictions against the membership of Negro workers in trade unions. The need to abolish discrimination in elections, hiring, rents, schools, the armed forces, etc., was dealt with in nine points of the platform.

Two factors in Party's program documents on the Negro question are of especial significance. In the first place, the Communists spoke in terms of the rights of the Negro race, that is, of the entire Negro population as an inseparable and integral part of the American nation. Later on, the Party stressed that, being an oppressed racial minority, the American Negroes are part of the American nation which populates the United States. In the second place, taking into account the important socio-economic shifts of the preceding decades, the Party spoke of the vanguard and leading role of the proletariat, including its Negro segment, in the struggle for achieving equal rights for the oppressed Negro race.

At the end of the 1920s, a sharp struggle developed within the Communist Party on a number of important issues, including the Negro question. Some in the Party leadership, especially the Pepper group, were drifting away from the program propositions. During the work of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1928, John Pepper wrote that the struggle for full racial, social and political equality of Negroes must be supplemented by a struggle for national liberation for all. The right to self-determination is the right to create their own state, their own government if this is what the

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 26, 1928, p. 6.

Negroes want. And more: Negro Communists must come out in their propaganda for the creation of a Negro Soviet Republic.

The self-determination slogan stemmed from an incorrect definition of the Negro population as a nation having the right to create an independent state. Speaking of the self-determination of nations, Lenin classified the United States among the countries where "progressive bourgeois national movements came to an end long ago".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in the struggle with the reactionary idea of "cultural-national" autonomy, he drew an analogy with the American South, where "cultural-national" autonomy for Negroes<sup>2</sup> was nothing other than a form of racial segregation.

The process of forming nations on the American continent had its distinctive features. There nations were formed to a large extent of people coming from other continents. In 1917, Lenin wrote of the U.S.A. that "vast national differences are speedily and fundamentally, as nowhere else in the world, smoothed out to form a single 'American' nation".<sup>3</sup> Indeed, national and ethnic groups did mix in the United States over several decades, although this process did not fail to leave its mark on the psychology and culture of the American nation. Racial differences, however, intermixed much more slowly in the United States. This was true particularly with regard to the Black race because of specific historical conditions: the members of this race were brought there forcibly and immediately placed in slavery. They were subjected to segregation and discrimination of the harshest forms.

The tenacity of racial differences and racism in the United States by no means provides grounds for considering Negroes as comprising a separate nation. The Negro population speaks the same language as does the white population; it never created its own economic life; and Negroes do not live within a compact territory where they would constitute a majority of the population. In fact, Negroes are not a majority in any state

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> See, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 277.



in the South. In 1940, Negroes accounted for over 25 percent of the population in only seven Southern states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina).<sup>1</sup> The advocates of national self-determination for the Negroes overlooked one very important process, namely, the progressive decline of the Southern plantations as the main center of the Negro population: the number of counties in the so-called Black Belt was steadily decreasing.

Nor can one agree with the thesis advanced in 1928 by some American Communists that an inclination toward separatism and nationalism was inherent in the Negroes, and that this inclination should have been directed into a revolutionary channel under the slogan of self-determination. Actually, such sentiments were held by only part of the Negro elite and were alien to the Negro masses.

Finally, one of the basic faults of this view of the Negro question was the fact that Negro working people themselves disagreed with it. This provided the ideological foes of the Communists with an excuse to criticize the Party program on the Negro question even after it had abandoned the self-determination slogan.

The supporters of national self-determination for Negroes succeeded in having the Sixth Congress of the Comintern define the Negro question in the United States as a colonial question, and state in its theses: "In those regions of the South in which compact Negro masses are living, it is essential to put forward the slogan of the right to self-determination for Negroes."<sup>2</sup>

The Communist Party officially adopted the Negro self-determination slogan in late 1928. However, the prospects that opened up in the 1930s for strengthening the unity of the Negro masses with the basic sectors of the American labor movement exposed the negative sides of the self-determination program and the necessity of abandoning it. In

<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies. Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies, Adopted by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, 1928*, London, 1929, p. 57.

the meantime, the Communists did much toward involving Negroes in the civil rights struggle.

Summing up, it may be said that the bourgeois-reformist Negro organizations did nothing substantial along the line of establishing ties with the labor movement, while the labor union leaders pursued a policy of discrimination. The Communists made repeated efforts to work with the masses, organize them and rally them to fight for Negro liberation, but failed to achieve any great success due to various difficulties that arose in their work.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE PROLETARIAT DURING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS  
(1929-33)

The panic that hit the New York stock exchange in late October 1929 became a kind of boundary marking the beginning of a new stage in the social development of the United States. The catastrophe was the logical result of the entire preceding evolution, although just before the crash came bourgeois propaganda had asserted that poverty and even social inequality in America were wiped out, never to return. In a speech on August 11, 1928, Herbert Clark Hoover said: "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land."<sup>1</sup> Only too soon were American workers to be convinced of the fallacy of that statement.

Unprecedented in its scope and speed, the curtailment of business activity, which at the end of 1929 occurred in all areas of economic life without exception, continued right up to mid-1932. According to the Federal Reserve Board, the national industrial production index dropped from 125 points in mid-1929 to 56 points in July 1932 (1923-1925=100).<sup>2</sup> In some major industries production cutbacks were on an even larger scale, above all in the auto, steel, transportation

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The New Day*, Palo Alto, California, 1928, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Yoder and George R. Davies, *Depression and Recovery*. New York, 1934, p. 114.

equipment, construction and mining industries.<sup>1</sup> Blast furnaces went out at the steel plants, coal mines were shut down, and oil wells abandoned. Between 1929 and 1932, pig iron production dropped from 42 million to 9 million tons, coal production from 544 million to 321 million tons. The number of automobiles coming off the assembly lines over that period dropped from 5.4 million to 1.4 million.

"No Help Wanted" signs began appearing more and more frequently on company doors in the fall of 1929, but the dimensions of the catastrophe did not become clear immediately. Many thought that all that was required was to maintain at the previous level the purchasing power of those who retained their jobs, and then the "temporary" troubles would be over and the disrupted balance on the labor supply-and-demand market would be re-established.

In late November 1929, President Hoover invited a group of top industrialists to the White House and asked them not to cut wages. The promise to comply with this request was made with the kind of ease that usually suggests no intention to fulfill it. That same day, a group of labor leaders (A.F.L. and the Railroad Brotherhoods) composed of William Green, John L. Lewis,



8. Unemployed in 1931. The wearisome wait for jobs

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 409, 415, 416 ff.



William Hutcheson John Ph. Frey, Matthew Woll and Anita Whitney also came to talk with the President, and for their part pledged, with a view to stimulating investment in industry, not to demand wage increases. The Green-Hoover agreement was sealed with a handshake, after which the labor leaders hastened to announce that their meeting with Hoover was extremely helpful to the cause of economic stability. However, it soon became apparent that nothing was to come of that compromise except the disarming of the workers in the economic struggle and the withdrawal of the trade unions from active resistance to the employers' offensive against the working people's standard of living.

While the Hoover Administration and the A.F.L. leaders were optimistic that "prosperity" was just around the corner and that there was no cause for concern, unemployment mounted rapidly. In a matter of four months, between October 1929 and January 1930, the number of jobless in the country grew from 492,000 to 4,065,000. The crisis had different effects on different groups of the working population. Unskilled workers were the first victims. White workers were in a relatively better position than Negro workers, unemployment among the Negro population being 10 to 50 percent greater than among the white population in all big industrial centers.<sup>1</sup> In a number of areas almost all Negro workers were left jobless. The dimensions of the calamity were greatest in large industrial cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit and Pittsburgh, with their preponderance of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the labor force. In industrial Pennsylvania, for example, about 40 percent of the state's able-bodied population was unemployed in 1932. Only in retail and wholesale trade and in communications (telephone and telegraph) were things going along relatively well. There, by March 1932, the employment index had dropped to 72 and 73.2, respectively.

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Manufactures. *Federal Aid for Unemployment Relief. A Bill to Provide for Cooperation by the Federal Government with the Several States in Relieving the Hardship and Suffering Caused by Unemployment, and for Other Purposes*, Part 1, January 3 to 17, 1933, Washington, 1933, pp. 279-80.

From the end of 1930, unemployment, attended by a steady decline in wages for workers who still had jobs, snowballed to unprecedented dimensions. In 1931, the unemployment figure already exceeded ten million, and in 1932 it reached the maximum of about 17 million,<sup>1</sup> which amounted to almost 35 percent of all wage-earners in the United States. One out of every three workers became unemployed in 1932. During the years of the crisis a total of at least 30 to 35 million Americans (if we count the unemployed and members of their families) were deprived of their means of livelihood and needed immediate relief. The difficult position of the working masses was aggravated by the fact that the United States at that time was extremely backward in terms of social legislation. For one thing, there was no unemployment insurance system. The unions mostly stuck to the Gompersite propositions and were not inclined to defend the rights of the unemployed. The A.F.L. leaders looked upon the idea of a government unemployment insurance system as an infringement on the sacred principle of "individualism"; they considered it "unfair" and not in keeping with the interests and traditions of the American labor movement.<sup>2</sup> Hopes that some kind of financial assistance might be forthcoming proved to be fruitless. President Hoover and a majority in Congress rejected demands for direct assistance to the unemployed and, taking advantage of the negative position held by the A.F.L., refused to consider inaugurating a system of unemployment insurance on the grounds that such a system was inconsistent with the high ideals of "Americanism".<sup>3</sup>

In the autumn of 1931, Hoover declared that the government's one and only concern was to create conditions promoting the development of private enterprise. Give business a chance to get on its feet, Hoover said, and that will be giving the truest kind of assistance to millions of ordinary workers. Any other form of federal government action in solving the problem of unemployment relief, in his view, could only undermine the system of self-government in the United

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book III*, New York, 1936, pp. 49-51.

<sup>2</sup> *American Federationist*, Vol. 38, No. 1, January 1931, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> *The State Papers and Other Public Writings of Herbert Hoover*, Vol. 1, Garden City, New York, 1934, pp. 400, 502, 504, 579.

States. Under this specious pretext, Hoover placed the responsibility for relief wholly with local authorities and charitable institutions. It was not long before no one in America had any doubt about the real nature of Hoover's policy.

Under conditions of massive and prolonged unemployment, any savings a worker's family might have had were obviously inadequate. The landlords' cup of patience, too, was soon exhausted as month after month jobless homeowners were unable to meet their mortgage payments. Insurance companies turned down all loan applications. There was only one form of money reserve left—bank savings. But half of the nation's worker families did not have them. Among white workers, 46 percent had savings, but on the average they did not exceed \$336. Negro families were in even worse financial straits.

Possibilities for mutual support were very limited. Yesterday's contributor became today's applicant for aid. Workers were compelled to seek help from private and religious charities with increasing frequency. But it had already become clear in 1930 that the funds of the charitable organizations and Red Cross aid committees were rapidly being exhausted. The



9. Children of unemployed demonstrating in New York in 1930

organizers of charity aid began speaking of their inability to help any significant portion of those in need. Faced with the necessity of dealing with the situation, some cities and states unwillingly took upon themselves a task that was clearly beyond their capabilities—to provide for the relief of the unemployed, whose numbers continued to grow. Food distribution stations could not cope with the job of feeding thousands of hungry people. Long breadlines girdled entire city blocks in New York. Manhattan was inundated with beggars. In the summer of 1931, the New York state legislature, convened for a special session by Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, hurriedly passed an emergency relief law, and New York City provided work for about 15,000 unemployed in the construction of public projects. Only insignificant funds were allocated for direct aid.

The relief program in New York was ideal in comparison with those in other cities, Chicago for example. The threat of a hunger rebellion in January 1932 induced the mayor of Chicago to appeal to the city's bourgeoisie to replenish the relief fund in order to eliminate the danger. Many other cities were on the verge of hunger rebellions. A study made in Detroit showed that the amount of aid given to the needy in that city in 1931 amounted to \$1.56 per person per week. And yet, this was not the worst case of degrading system of public charity.

In the beginning of 1933, Senator Robert La Follette made an analysis of the state of affairs in relief. Basing himself on the findings of a special Senate subcommittee he cited many facts attesting to the utter inadequacy of the measures that had been undertaken. He said that further arguments were hardly needed to show that the dimensions of relief had sunk below the danger mark, with the threat of the physical exhaustion of adults and children looming. The Pennsylvania State Department of Health reported an alarming increase in the incidence of physical exhaustion among school-age children. It had grown from 10 percent in 1930 to 28 percent in 1933. The lack of funds for shoes and clothing kept children out of school. Meager funds made it impossible to help people meet their payments for community services: gas, electricity, etc. Miss Edith Abbot, a member of the relief administration in Chicago,



mentioned many cases where water had been turned off in the homes of the unemployed because of non-payment of bills, although this was against the sanitation rules.

In the West, the unemployment epidemic afflicted what were only yesterday flourishing industrial centers growing on the yeast of huge investments. In November 1932, a special commission in California came to the following conclusion after making an investigation into the unemployment situation: "Unemployment and loss of income have ravaged numerous homes.... Many households have been dissolved; little children parcelled out to friends, relatives, or charitable homes.... Homes in which life savings were invested and hopes bound up have been lost never to be recovered.

"Men, young and old, have taken to the road. They sleep each night in a new flophouse. Day after day, the country over, they stand in the bread lines for food... Destitution reaches the women and children. New itinerant types develop: 'woman vagrants' and 'juvenile transients'. There are no satisfactory methods of dealing with these thousands adrift. Precarious ways of existing, questionable methods of 'getting by' rapidly develop.... There is no security, no foothold, no future to sustain them..."<sup>1</sup>

The migration of jobless persons became one of the most noticeable demographic developments of the time. The movement went mainly in two directions—from North to South and from East to West. The decisive factor in the choice of direction was the climate: in the warm Southern states it was easier to wander about in search of work, and one could sleep under the open sky. Here and there, in order to prevent the breakout of disease, local authorities had to set up temporary havens for transients. The state of California, for example, organized work camps for thousands of homeless. For exhausting work in building roads in the mountains and in marshy almost impassable places—work often involving mortal danger—the unemployed received scanty nourishment, a little clothing, a roof over their heads and tobacco. For

<sup>1</sup> *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission*, State Building, San Francisco, November 1932, Sacramento, 1933, pp. 145-46.

most of the states and big cities, however, finding work for the unemployed was essentially an insoluble problem.

The existence of a multi-million army of unemployed enabled employers to cut the wages of those still holding jobs. The sharpest wage reduction began in early 1931, although cuts in the preceding years were also quite large, especially in small companies. In the spring of 1931, Secretary of Commerce Lamont openly announced the necessity of wage reductions, and big business did not force itself to wait. In October 1931, United States Steel announced a 10 percent wage cut. General Motors, United States Rubber, the textile barons of New England and the coal kings of Illinois, Pennsylvania and West Virginia immediately followed suit. Wages at the Ford plants were cut by 25 percent.

The following official figures on the decline of the annual incomes of full-time workers in a number of industries gave an idea of the losses these workers suffered as a result of the high-handed robbery committed by capital in condition of mass unemployment (in dollars):

Table 4

Industry	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	397	388	312	247	230
Mining	1,526	1,424	1,221	1,016	990
Contract construction	1,674	1,526	1,233	907	869
Manufacturing	1,543	1,488	1,369	1,150	1,086
Transportation	1,643	1,610	1,549	1,373	1,334

The corporations carried out their wage reduction operation essentially without running into any difficulties. There was virtually no labor unions in the mass-production industries, and workers who remained in the workshops were not

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 95.

prepared for decisive action and valued their jobs too much to try to oppose the wage cuts, which were now being made on a nation-wide scale. In places where the old horrors of the early days of the English factory system flourished, the value of labor power was set not only by the free play of the economic law of supply and demand, but also by harsh methods of non-economic coercion. Mass unemployment gave employers great advantages and allowed them to dictate any working conditions they wanted to the workers.

The position of the employed part of the working class during the period 1929-1933 deteriorated also because of continued speed-up, which in many cases was coupled with an increase in hours. The widespread use of child labor was also instrumental in lowering the value of labor power and raising the degree of exploitation.

Mention should be made of another important effect of the economic crisis on the position of working people. The extraordinary force of the economic calamity that befell the country led to a levelling-out of differences in the well-being of different sections of the working class. Very many skilled workers who belonged to A.F.L. craft unions found themselves in the ranks of the unemployed, and the wages of skilled workers dropped sharply in the steel, clothing, machine-building, coal and other industries. As a consequence, the upper stratum of the working class, encountering such serious adversity for the first time, began to feel a kinship with the mass of workers and to share the anxieties of its class.

The difficult economic position of the American working people in the years of the crisis and the persistent efforts of the ruling class to lay the whole burden of material privations on laboring America led to an exacerbation of social contradictions in the country.

The conditions under which the labor movement in the United States developed during the years of the crisis were complex and difficult. The events had taken the working class unawares. Labor was inadequately organized to face the disaster. In essence, the open shop system prevailed in industry during that period, with employers striving at any cost to prevent their employees from organizing, and refusing to hire workers who were already union members. Wide use was made

of the injunction to curb mass actions of the proletariat and various forms of trade union activity. For their part, the leaders of the A.F.L. and Railroad Brotherhoods, clinging to the conservative craft-union system, deliberately narrowed the scope of the labor movement. Defending only the interests of highly paid skilled workers, they hampered the movement to organize industrial unions. As a result, the A.F.L. by 1929 had become a caste-locked organization, embracing only the upper segment of the working class and preaching the ideology of "class peace in industry".

No more than 10 percent of the nation's industrial workers were organized. A.F.L. membership steadily declined to reach 2,769,000 by 1929 (a loss of 1.3 million members since 1920).<sup>1</sup> Most union members were in a limited number of industries and concentrated primarily in areas where trade union activity was traditionally high.

The dominance of craft unionism impeded the growth of the organized labor movement, fettered its energies and did the greatest damage to the interests of workers in the basic industries who, from the point of view of the A.F.L. leaders, could not become full-fledged trade union members because of the alleged "heterogeneity" of the interests of workers in the various trades working in these industries. Of the more than ten million workers in the manufacturing industry in 1930, only 380,000 were union members.<sup>2</sup> In the two preceding decades, employment in the mining, radio, chemical, auto, and steel industries had doubled and even tripled, yet the extent to which workers in these industries were organized was so small that no one ever spoke of it seriously. This was particularly characteristic of the auto, steel, aircraft, oil and rubber industries. Of the half million workers employed in 1929 in the auto industry, 3,000 at the most belonged to the United Automobile Workers (A.F.L.). The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had no more than 5,000 members. The bulk of the employees in these industries were semiskilled or unskilled workers who, according to the organizational principles of Gompersism, were not in line

<sup>1</sup> Leo Wolman, *Ebb and Flow in Trade Unionism*, New York, 1936, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-93, 200-11.



for trade union membership. Ford himself once said that 80 percent of the workers at his plants were unskilled. In 1933, 40 percent of those employed in the steel industry were laborers.<sup>1</sup>

The forces putting up resistance to the policies of splitting the labor movement and class collaboration with the bourgeoisie had grouped primarily around the Trade Union Educational League (T.U.E.L.), reorganized in 1929 into the Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.). These associations were the bulwark of trade union initiative: they led a number of strikes, put out slogans for a revival of the militant traditions of the American labor movement, advocated reorganization of trade unions, fought for progressive social legislation, and came out vigorously against racial discrimination, corruption and gangsterism in the trade unions. However, the agitation of the left elements frequently found but little response, and their influence on the broad masses remained limited.

However, the vital forces of the labor movement were not dead. The movement continued to develop below the surface, as it were. This process was reflected to some extent in the establishment in May 1929 of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (C.P.L.A.), headed by social-reformists A. J. Muste, Sidney Hook, James Burnham, J. B. S. Hardman and others.

At first the goals of the new organization were defined primarily as educational. However, the C.P.L.A. leaders soon found themselves involved in many strikes. As a result, the logic of the struggle itself induced them to abandon purely educational activity in favor of more or less active intervention into events. The C.P.L.A. program represented a complex combination of Fabian socialism and De Leonian syndicalist theory. At the same time, certain points in the organization's political program brought the Muste group close to the left wing of the U.S. labor movement. For example, the C.P.L.A. considered the organization of the semiskilled and unskilled to be an urgent matter, opposed the application of injunctions and the anti-labor union practices of employers, and advocated

a comprehensive system of social insurance. It also favored U.S. recognition of Soviet Russia.

Ideologically, the C.P.L.A. had much in common with the Socialist Party, then headed by Norman Thomas. But similarity did not turn into identity. The Socialists had long lost their former influence because their leaders had abandoned active struggle for the interests of the proletariat, opposed themselves to all really left trends, and spent their energies on fruitless factional quarrels and the search for nonexistent ways to reach a land of "social harmony" that would bypass the stage of mobilizing the main forces for struggle against the old social system. By 1929, the Party had a membership of only about 6,000, and its influence among the industrial workers was insignificant. In their practical activity, the Socialists confined themselves to petty-bourgeois and liberal-intellectual circles.

The American proletariat's resistance to the onslaught of big business was made difficult also by the smallness of its vanguard, the Communist Party, which, moreover, was compelled to work under the extremely difficult conditions of a semi-legal existence. This was one of the reasons why the Party's work was largely agitational in character. In 1929, the Communist Party had 9,642 members, and the daily circulation of communist newspapers did not exceed 30,000 copies.

Thus, when it came face to face with severe trials, the American working class was unprepared. The trade union movement was in a state of decline, with most workers remaining outside its ranks. The lack of unity among the masses of workers was aggravated by deep-rooted traditions of trade union separatism, the existence of many barriers between skilled and unskilled workers, native-born and foreign-born, whites and Blacks, among workers of different nationalities, and so on. The energy of the masses was constrained by the policy of class peace pursued by the leaders of the A.F.L., making it extremely difficult to overcome the mood of indecisiveness and hopelessness induced by the long period of stagnation and disorganization.

All this, coupled with the pressure of the constantly growing surplus labor power in the form of the multi-million army of

<sup>1</sup> Horace B. Davis, *Labor and Steel*, New York, 1933, p. 20.

unemployed, led to a dwindling of the strike movement and a low level of effectiveness of most of the actions taken by workers.

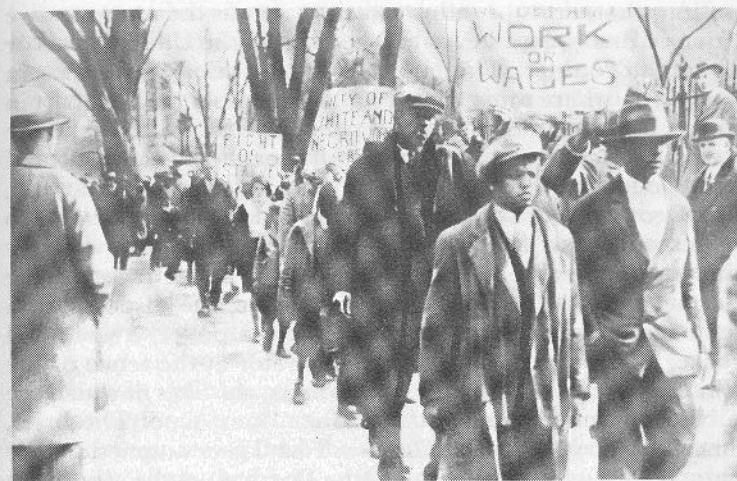
But although the strike movement declined during the depression, the very first year of the national calamity gave rise to other forms of struggle. From the summer of 1930, the unemployed movement showed every sign of rapid growth. Enjoying the sympathy of the vast majority of the American people, it embodied the social protest of the masses. The Communist Party organ, *Political Affairs*, wrote that during the crisis "in the very forefront of the struggle against the monopolists' policies was the battle for unemployment insurance".<sup>1</sup>

The first actions of the unemployed were uncoordinated; by far not everywhere did those who took part in them have a clear understanding of the prospects of the struggle or its



10. Police block the way to demonstrators in New York in 1930

<sup>1</sup> *Political Affairs*, September 1949, p. 85.



11. Demonstration of unemployed (Hunger March) in Washington, March 6, 1930

connection with the main trends of socio-economic development. Under these circumstances, the Communist Party took the initiative and played an exceptionally important role in organizing the unemployed movement and working out its ideological platform. At the very onset of the economic crisis it came out with a "Program for Work Among Unemployed", a document which set forth the following important demands: a government unemployment insurance system with benefits equalling full wages; turning over the job of organizing the entire social insurance system to the workers; a network of employment offices, managed by representatives of the workers; relief for the jobless by the federal, state and municipal authorities.<sup>1</sup> The Party had to surmount many difficulties as it mobilized the masses for struggle in support of these demands.

Despite strenuous resistance from the reactionaries and the trade union bureaucrats, the efforts of the Communists were not in vain. On March 6, 1930, 1,250,000 unemployed went

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 9, 1929, p. 4.



out into the streets of industrial cities. It was the most massive action of unemployed ever to take place in the United States or any other country. The largest demonstration took place in New York, where more than 100,000 unemployed took part in a mass meeting and where the police tried hard to make the event look like a gigantic "Red plot" provoked by a handful of "trouble-makers" on orders from abroad. "Fight or Starve!", "We Demand Work or Wages!"—these slogans struck home to millions of working people. That day, numerous newspaper photographs registered such scenes as the sea of faces during the meeting in New York's Union Square, the dispersal of a demonstration on Broadway by mounted police, a wounded worker, the police beating a demonstrator at the fence of the White House in Washington, and others, the likes of which the public, it seemed, had not seen for a long time. The brief, almost military report in *The New York Times* summed up the main results of that anxious day. The banner headline was "Red Riots in Many Cities in America and Europe". Then followed: "Demonstrations by Communists in the leading cities of this country yesterday resulted in about 100 arrests and injuries to more than three-score persons. In Detroit, mounted police charged 75,000. In Cleveland, twenty persons were hurt in a clash with police. In Pittsburgh, twelve were arrested. Philadelphia and Chicago saw peaceful demonstrations. In San Francisco, Mayor Rolph received the marchers and addressed them."<sup>1</sup> That the Communists' actions were so effective came as a surprise to many: the numerically small C. P. had managed to revive the most massive and at the same time the most effective form of the movement in peaceful conditions—a nation-wide demonstration. This required a great deal of organizational work.

The events of March 6 had great repercussions in the nation's political life. They ushered in important changes in the social climate. Thenceforth, hardly anyone could doubt that unemployment had become national problem No. 1. It visibly revealed itself in a wave of mighty demonstrations, and the ruling circles were compelled willy-nilly to reckon with it. In this respect, the reaction of Franklin D. Roosevelt, then the

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, March 7, 1930, p. 1.

Governor of New York, was typical. American historian Alfred Rollins, in his book, *Roosevelt and Howe*, touching on Roosevelt's perception of social problems in 1929 and 1930, writes: "Publicly he ignored mounting unemployment, though from time to time he checked the available statistics with Frances Perkins."<sup>1</sup> In March, Rollins says further, "when real alarm began to spread", Roosevelt showed no outward signs of anxiety; however, at his decision a special committee on the "Stabilization of Industry for the Prevention of Unemployment" was set up. He called for facing "this unpleasant fact dispassionately and constructively as a scientist faces a test tube of deadly germs, intending first to understand the nature, the cause and effect..."<sup>2</sup>

Roosevelt was able to keep his presence of mind and stand by his conviction that what had happened did not yet call for drastic measures against the upsurge of the labor movement. However, some members of Congress were short on staying-power. In April 1930, Congressman Hamilton Fish introduced a draft resolution on the creation of a special five-man committee to investigate the activities of the Communist Party. An absolute majority in the House of Representatives voted to adopt the resolution, and by the end of the year the Fish Committee had already called the leader of the C.P., William Foster, to testify before it. At the same time, however, another point of view immediately revealed itself in influential ruling class circles. Many, like Roosevelt, felt that police persecution and terror could only increase the growing discontent and lead to undesirable results. William Allen White, a writer and a prominent figure in the Republican Party, wrote to William Green in September 1931 in reference to the organization of effective relief for the unemployed: "It is the only way to keep down barricades in the streets this winter and the use of force which will brutalize labor and impregnate it with revolution in America for a generation."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When Roosevelt was Governor of New York, Frances Perkins headed the relief program in that state.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., *Roosevelt and Howe*, New York, 1962, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> William Allen White, *Selected Letters 1899-1943*, edited with an introduction by Walter Johnson, New York, 1947, p. 317.

The unemployed movement steadily grew, embracing more and more industrial centers. The demonstration of March 6, 1930, marked a transition from uncoordinated actions to a broad mass movement and its gradual consolidation around demands for relief and social insurance.

In the first months, organizations of unemployed — primarily the unemployed councils led by Communists — waged the struggle for relief on a local level. One of their first tasks was to prevent evictions of the poor from their homes. Quite often in skirmishes with police, residents of workers' districts, led by the unemployed councils, carried back into the houses the furniture and belongings of people who had been mercilessly thrown out by landlords.

Most of the demands made by organizations of unemployed, naturally, were associated with local conditions and centered around local problems. But there were also some things that all these outwardly uncoordinated efforts had in common. Figuring prominently everywhere was the question of society's or the state's responsibility to its members, who through no fault of their own had become the victims of economic disarray and were therefore not asking for charity but seeking what was due them. Significant in this respect were the demands put forth by the participants in demonstrations of unemployed in Chicago in 1932. They included: a weekly benefit of \$7.50 for a family of two and an additional benefit for every dependent; a stop to evictions; free gas, water, electricity and coal; free hot lunches in the schools; free school bus transportation for children of unemployed.

It was not long before the weak sides of the movement also came to light, manifesting themselves in an inadequately developed network of local organizations of unemployed and the absence of a single coordinating center.

On July 4, 1930, at the initiative of the Communist Party, a congress convened in Chicago to discuss the principles of organizing and leading the unemployed movement. In attendance were 1,320 delegates, most of whom represented T.U.U.L. unions and unemployed councils. The congress adopted a program and defined the structure of a national organization of unemployed. A National Unemployment Council was created.

These measures were timely, particularly since they coincided with a new upsurge in the struggle for relief and social insurance that began in the second half of 1930. Tens of thousands of unemployed and employed workers participated in demonstrations against the threat of fascism and war organized by the C.P. on August 1, 1930. On September 1, Fight Unemployment Day, the streets of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia again became scenes of large meetings of unemployed.

The forms of the movement were changing. Hunger marches of unemployed to present municipal authorities with concrete demands were assuming increasing importance. One of the first marches of this kind took place on October 16, 1930, in New York, to be repeated in Chicago, Detroit, Sacramento and many other cities. These actions strengthened the unemployed councils and helped increase their popularity among the masses. People began to realize that hope for salvation from hunger could come only through solidarity and organization. The psychological breakthrough embodied in the growing vigor of the unemployed movement immediately made itself felt, promoting the organization of local aid to the unemployed.

Hunger marches of delegations of unemployed to state capitals began in the spring of 1931. Giving the unemployed movement great sense of purpose, these marches drew new sections of the industrial proletariat into the common struggle. The first marches of this kind took place in late February and early March 1931 in the states of New York and New Jersey; in the months that followed, marches were organized in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois and other states. All in all, 11 marches to state legislatures were organized in 1931.

The growing influence of the C.P. and the popularity of the unemployed councils it led, on the one hand, and the worsening economic position of the working people in 1931 and 1932, including also the urban middle strata, on the other, influenced the attitudes of moderate and reformist leaders. The Socialist Party and the C.P.L.A. became widely active among the unemployed. In 1931, the League of Industrial Democracy and the S.P. organized the Chicago Workers'



Unemployment Committee. By the autumn of that year the Committee had eight branches in Chicago and 63 by January 1933.

At about the same time, Muste's group (the C.P.L.A.) organized a League of Unemployed Citizens in the state of Washington. Similar leagues appeared in other states as well, primarily in small cities in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and became quite influential in the Mid-West. The first national congress of unemployed leagues took place July 1-4, 1933, in Columbus, Ohio. One and a half thousand delegates voted for the creation of the National Unemployed League which was to do considerable work in organizing a system of self-help for the unemployed.

It all started in the summer of 1931, when 13,000 families of unemployed living in the suburbs of Seattle united into groups by trade and tried to organize a direct products-exchange system. Some worked for food on suburban farms, others went to work as servants to landlords who provided shelter to the homeless. The movement grew rapidly and soon had 22 branches. The self-help movement assumed various forms, ranging from simple individual links to rather highly developed relations in communities in which the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance among working-class families in the struggle with a common misfortune was high.

It was not along these lines, however, that the unemployed movement developed on the whole. Circumstances taught the working class offensive rather than defensive forms and methods of struggle. In the first half of 1931, the economic crisis deepened, and this not only increased the army of unemployed but at the same time lent impetus to the movement. In March 1931, the *Daily Worker* carried this statement on its front page: "From an entirely formless, organizationally, and vague, programatically, unemployed movement of one year ago, there is now at least the firm beginnings of a national organization and it has a definite program of demands."<sup>1</sup> The shift was noticeable everywhere. In late September 1931, Edward McGrady (special A.F.L.

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, March 21, 1931, p. 1.

representative in Congress) noted in a letter to a convention of the North Carolina Federation of Labor that in the near future "hunger riots" could break out not only in separate, isolated centers, but in all industrial areas. Bold talk could be heard everywhere, he said, and apparently many were simply waiting for the emergence of a leader who would tell them that the road to relief lay through violence. That, he concluded, was the way the situation in the country shaped up, and it required taking relief measures not some time in the future, but right at the moment.

McGrady was not exaggerating. His statement and others like it were evoked by a new upsurge of the struggle of the unemployed locally. With every passing day hunger marches and demonstrations such as those by miners and steelworkers in Pittsburgh and the mining districts of Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky, and the joint actions of unemployed and farmers in Minnesota, usually organized by the T.U.U.L. and the unemployed councils, became increasingly massive and politically significant.

The struggle of the unemployed became particularly acute in the second half of 1931. In early August, three workers were killed in a clash with police in Chicago. Over 100,000 persons attended their funeral. On October 7, 1931, two workers were killed in a clash with police in Cleveland. Thirty thousand people buried the dead. Public attention was riveted to stormy demonstrations of unemployed in front of state capitols, and other spontaneous actions of the most varied forms.

In October 1931, the national executive committee of the T.U.U.L. adopted a decision to stage a national hunger march on Washington in December. Following the decision, columns of marchers moved from Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo and Boston. News of this caused alarm in Washington. Newspaper headlines announced: "Mutinous Columns on Way to Capital", "Reds Are Approaching". On December 2, Vice President Charles Curtis, Speaker of the House Longworth, Senators Frazier, Thomas, Black, Costigan and Wheeler and all of the top police officials of Washington, D.C., gathered to work out a plan of action. A spokesman for the White House, Curtis proposed taking emergency precautionary measures. As a result of the consultation, it was announced that both houses



12. The Chicago detachment of the veterans' march on Washington, May 3, 1932

of Congress would refuse to receive a delegation of the unemployed and that the police would take all necessary steps to prevent an "illegal demonstration". The Washington police force was put on the alert.

All these measures, however, did not diminish the popularity of the national hunger march on Washington. Its slogans included an unemployment insurance law; assistance to the needy; a seven-hour day without a reduction in wages for those who had jobs; and satisfaction of the demands of war veterans and farmers.

On December 6, 1931, four columns of automobiles carrying 1,500 marchers pulled into Washington. Along the way they were met by demonstrations and meetings of solidarity. As the conservative *Washington Star* wrote, no one could fail to feel sympathy for the men and women who engaged in this action.

The significance of the first national hunger march can hardly be exaggerated. It lay above all in the fact that, for the

first time, the question of government unemployment insurance was put into the sphere of practical action. The march drew the attention of the broad masses of workers, and the number of those who took part in it in one way or another reached several hundreds of thousands. It summed up, as it were, a whole stage in the development of the movement, involving a series of hunger marches in cities, counties and states.

The state of affairs at the local level augured the approach of decisive events. The winter of 1932 put the relief budgets on the brink of bankruptcy, and this—as recognized by the most diverse observers—was fraught with catastrophic political consequences. Very significant was the situation in Illinois, which, according to estimates made by both left and right, was close to critical. The *Progressive* warned that unless direct federal aid to the unemployed was forthcoming, Illinois would run into consequences in 1932 tantamount to a social catastrophe. Participants in a special conference on unemployment came to a similar conclusion.

At the beginning of 1932, Samuel Insull, one of the biggest magnates in the state of Illinois, urged Governor Emmerson to call a session of the legislature to discuss relief measures. With massive demonstrations taking place in the streets of Chicago, the legislature decided not to tempt fate and almost without debate voted to allocate \$90 million for relief. The *Progressive* wrote that only the fear of a rebellion forced the legislature to pass this measure.

All this, of course, did not mean that the Illinois bourgeoisie had abandoned methods of violence. The Chicago police continued to use force to counter the organized actions of the unemployed wherever possible. One example was the armed provocation in May 1932 against a meeting of unemployed in Chicago, as a result of which ten workers were wounded. The same aims were pursued when the Chicago mounted police engaged in intricate maneuvers during a hunger march organized in April 1932 by the unemployed council and the meat-packers' union. It was only thanks to the self-control of the march organizers and the discipline of its participants that confrontation and bloodshed was avoided.



The aggravation of the economic crisis in 1931 and 1932 and the upsurge of the unemployed movement sparked mass actions by all sections of the population who personally felt the burden of the crisis.

In the summer of 1932, the country became witness to dramatic events connected with action taken by war veterans. The year before, participants in the hunger marches organized by the Communist party had urged that veterans' demands for financial assistance be satisfied. In April 1932, Communist leaders of the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League—Peter V. Cacchione, James W. Ford and Emanuel Levin—came before the House Budget Committee to demand the immediate payment to all ex-servicemen of a bonus consisting of an additional \$1.00 for every day of home service during the First World War and \$1.25 a day for overseas service. They based this demand on the fact that in 1924 Congress had promised to pay additional compensation for army service in 20 years, that is, in 1945. But thousands of former servicemen, tired of the long and fruitless search for jobs, were asking, "If the money really belongs to us, why can't we get it when we really need it?" The congressional committee rejected the demand.

In May 1932, a movement for a national veterans' march on Washington sprang up almost simultaneously in many cities. The banner of the march was the demand that Congress pass a bill, introduced by Congressman Wright Patman, under which veterans would receive a bonus of \$2,400 million ahead of schedule. The first to take action were the veterans of Portland, Oregon, who chose Walter Waters, a former manager of a small cannery, as their leader. A large group of Portland veterans left their homes, and by May 21 reached St. Louis. There, they almost managed to seize a Baltimore and Ohio freight train that was heading for Washington. The authorities were alarmed by the turn of events, and the Illinois National Guard was called out immediately. However, a confrontation was avoided after the veterans were provided with auto transportation to Washington.

Soon the movement embraced the whole country. In Cleveland several thousands of veterans seized the shunting tracks and the Pennsylvania Railroad station. Veterans were

converging on the U.S. capital from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Washington, Alaska and even Honolulu. The marchers arrived in Washington in tatters, exhausted and half-starved. Many had brought their wives and children.

By June there were as many as 20,000 veterans in Washington. The authorities were aware that any show of intolerance toward the detachments of veterans, who were disciplined and kept themselves "within bounds", could immediately cost them public support. It was therefore decided to give the Bonus Army a chance to acquire formal status. With official blessing, Waters became its commander-in-chief and, at the same time, deputy chief of police of Washington, D.C. The veterans were permitted to set up a temporary camp in the Anacostia flats across the Potomac, and to occupy several empty federal buildings between Third Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Thousands of veterans, their wives and children settled down at Anacostia in hastily knocked-together shacks, army tents or simply in dugouts. The fear of epidemics and hunger revolts induced the authorities to concern themselves about the most essential needs. However, the government and local authorities focussed their main attention on how to get the veterans out of Washington as fast as possible, for with every passing day their presence increased the threat of sudden explosion, particularly since fresh contingents were entering the city and the influence of "respectable" leaders like Waters was waning.

The famous picketing of the Capitol, undertaken at the initiative of progressive leaders, began on June 12. That unprecedented "death march" lasted five days and five nights. On the third day, two companies of Marines were hastily called out to the Capitol. The situation grew tense. On June 15, the Patman bill was passed by the House of Representatives, but Hoover immediately announced that if the Senate passed it, he would veto it. On June 17, the Senate gathered to debate the bill. Surrounding the Congress house, 20,000 veterans awaited the results of the voting. In silence they listened to the report on the results: 62 against, 18 for. Heeding Waters' exhortations, the crowds of veterans dispersed and returned to their shacks and tents at Anacostia.

On June 14, a secret meeting of top military men was held in the office of U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas

MacArthur: the government had decided to order the forcible expulsion of the veterans from Washington. The meeting was called to work out the details of the operation and to find a plausible pretext.

The signal for "operation evacuation" was the announcement on July 27 that the government was planning to raze the buildings on the corner of Third Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, where over a thousand veterans had settled. On the next day, Washington's chief of police, Gen. Glassford, personally ordered the veterans to vacate the buildings. In the brief skirmish that followed, police killed two veterans. The commander of that group of veterans, Wilford, later said that there was no battle, and even after the brief incident in which two men were killed, everything was calm for the two hours until the troops came. Gen. Glassford was in a position to control the events, but the government had already decided to bring in the troops and was not about to reverse that decision. The troops were alerted and only waiting for the order. The order was given, and everyone knows what happened then.

On the afternoon of July 28, units of the regular U.S. Army under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur began the expulsion operation. Six tanks, a machine-gun platoon, four cavalry squadrons and four infantry companies took part in it. First the buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue were cleared. Then, toward evening an offensive against the veterans' shack camp at Anacostia began. Soldiers in gas masks threw tear-gas grenades over the whole territory and burned the shacks. Dispersing the crowds of unarmed men, women and children and destroying their hastily built barricades, the soldiers of the U.S. Army victoriously completed the rout of their enemy. Down the roads of Virginia and Maryland fled many thousands of people, driven out by the government which they had regarded as the symbol of civilization and democracy, and by the army in whose ranks many of them had once fought. Coming as an epilogue to the "Battle of Washington" was the following statement by Hoover: "A challenge to the authority of the United States Government has been met, swiftly and firmly. After months of patient indulgence, the government met overt lawlessness as it always must be met.... The first

obligation of office is to uphold and defend the Constitution and the authority of the law. This I propose always to do."<sup>1</sup> America learned a practical lesson in class struggle.

The veterans' movement, especially at its initial stage, took the form of a spontaneous mass struggle for financial assistance. It grew out of the day-to-day struggle of the unemployed and was itself an inseparable part of it. On the whole, the movement was democratic in character and objectively directed against the anti-popular policy of the government and the monopolies, although the specific features in political coloring it acquired were determined largely by the heterogeneity of its participants and the prevalence of petty-bourgeois elements in its leadership.

Realizing this, the progressive elements of the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League expended no little effort after the veterans were driven from the capital to organize a broader movement around slogans calling to fight for democracy and social progress. With this aim, a National Veterans Committee was formed which included members of the Communist Party. The Committee sponsored a number of actions of the veterans and took measures to work out a program of joint action with other segments of the labor movement.

On their part, reactionary leaders such as Waters and Al Smith attempted to shift the veterans' movement to the right. The demarcation within the veterans' movement reflected those internal processes which were becoming typical for the labor movement as a whole. In essence this was a dispute over the further development of the unemployed movement and the direction to be taken by the new contingents of industrial workers now being drawn into the common struggle.

The second national hunger march on Washington was organized by the Communist Party in December 1932. Hundreds of organizations of unemployed took part in the preparations. The main demands of the march were: emergency unemployment relief; aid to hard-pressed farmers; unemployment insurance; and the paying out of the veterans'

<sup>1</sup> William Starr Myers, *The State Papers and Other Public Writings of Herbert Hoover*, Vol. 2, Garden City, New York, 1934, p. 245.



bonus. About 3,000 persons took part, among them several hundred members of the A.F.L. The liberal press and many influential democratic organizations were sympathetic. On December 6, three columns of marchers entered Washington from the direction of Baltimore, Cumberland and Richmond. The atmosphere was well captured by a correspondent for the *Progressive*, who wrote that although Washington was full of police, although the police sirens drowned the streets with their piercing screams, although the federal buildings were crammed with reserve officers and Marines, although detachments of the cavalry were alerted, although all of Washington was electrified by news of the hunger march, nonetheless the residents of Capitol Hill made believe that nothing was happening. The hunger march became the main topic in Washington newspapers—but the members of Congress preserved a deafening silence. Mounted police surrounded the Capitol. The building was closed to visitors. Ambulances stood by ready to pick up the dead and wounded. The tone of the newspaper headlines and articles was provocative, specially calculated to alarm the residents of the capital and make the situation unbearable.

The *Progressive* went on to say that by order of the police, marchers were kept from coming any closer than two blocks from the Capitol and White House. The delegates of unemployed organizations proceeded to the Capitol escorted by three hundred motorcycle policemen and were literally squeezed in by police on all sides, with police cars bringing up the rear. The marchers could barely stand on their feet. They were poorly dressed; they arrived in Washington having hardly any rest and scant food. But these people carried out their mission.<sup>1</sup>

Like the veterans' march, the hunger marches were of great significance in the country's political life. Under trying conditions the working people managed to achieve economic gains which, although minor, were nonetheless important in principle. Social security was somewhat improved: the number of states which passed old-age pension laws grew from 7 in 1928 to 27 in 1933. In 1933, Congress began debate on a bill providing for federal old-age assistance (the Dill-Connery

<sup>1</sup> See, *Progressive*, December 17, 1932.

Bill).<sup>1</sup> In 1931 and 1932, seven states passed laws providing for the appropriation of funds for unemployment relief. Unemployment insurance bills were debated in 17 states in 1931, and in 25 states and the District of Columbia in 1933. Only one state, Wisconsin, however, passed a law on unemployment insurance, the first in the history of U.S. labor legislation (the Groves Act, 1932).

The broad and active movement of unemployed had a definite influence on the A.F.L., the state legislatures, the U.S. Congress and the Administration. A.F.L. leaders had to take into account the sentiments of the huge army of unemployed and the ferment within the labor movement itself, now in a critical position. Trade union membership was falling. In 1929 it had stood at 3,461,000, to drop to 3,048,000 in 1933. The A.F.L. had only 2,318,000 members in 1933.<sup>2</sup> Trade union treasuries were becoming depleted, and newspaper and magazine circulation dropped sharply. Strike funds diminished. The wages of trade union members fell catastrophically. Millions of workers could not provide the bare essentials for themselves and their families. All this was a heavy blow to the ideology of business trade unionism and the theory of labor-capital cooperation.

The economic crisis seriously undermined confidence in Gompersism. Reality showed that all talk of trade union "neutrality" and non-involvement in politics only played into the hands of capital. Loud voices were raised in the labor movement in favor of positive changes in the social structure and labor union participation in this reorganization.

Serious trials awaited the reactionary leadership of the A.F.L. in connection with the polemic around the question of unemployment insurance. Workers demanded government intervention into the matter of unemployment relief, regardless of what Green and Co. kept saying about loyalty to traditions and the inapplicability of a system of social insurance to America. Opposition within the A.F.L. grew, and an

<sup>1</sup> *Labor and the New Deal*, ed. by Milton Derber and Edwin Young, Madison, 1957, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 97.

increasing number of locals urged that the Federation come out strongly in support of unemployment insurance. This struggle had a marked influence on a number of major trade unions affiliated to the A.F.L. In 1930, the state federations of labor in New York, Utah, Wisconsin, California and Rhode Island, the American Federation of Teachers, the International Association of Machinists, and other unions spoke out in favor of introducing a system of unemployment insurance. At an A.F.L. convention (October 1930) in Boston, delegates from the United Textile Workers Union, the trade unions of Newport, and the International Association of Wood Carvers drew up resolutions demanding an unemployment insurance system. However, the A.F.L. leadership succeeded in tabling the resolutions and turning the question over to the executive council for consideration.

The question was raised once again even more vociferously at a convention in Vancouver (October 1931). The California Federation of Labor, the American Federation of Teachers, the United Trade Unions of Seattle, and the glass workers union introduced a resolution supporting the demand for unemployment insurance. The executive council again succeeded in diverting the resolution, although this time it had to expend maximum effort. In stating the position of the executive council, John Frey said that a permanent system of unemployment insurance was unconstitutional.

Subsequent events showed how unpopular was the A.F.L. leadership's line among the broad trade union masses. Soon after the Vancouver convention, the leaders of the United Mine Workers, John L. Lewis, Philip Murray and Thomas Kennedy finally broke their long diplomatic silence and advocated a system of federal unemployment insurance.<sup>1</sup> At the initiative of several locals, a Committee for Unemployment Insurance and Relief was set up within the A.F.L., and its activities received wide publicity and support. The Committee was headed by Communist Louis Weinstock. A referendum conducted by the Committee confirmed the existence of a sharp line between the bulk of rank-and-file union members and their leaders.

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Unity*, May 1932, p. 12.

At the height of the Washington events, executive council of the A.F.L. reversed itself on July 22, 1932, and endorsed the idea of unemployment insurance. Three months later, an A.F.L. convention in Cincinnati, with the silent consent of the executive council, adopted by a vote of 300 to 5 the resolution of the miners' union supporting the idea of a system of unemployment insurance. In a letter to a friend, John Frey wrote frankly that a number of the executive council members opposed unemployment insurance, but did not dare say so in the face of the popular movement demanding what he considered to be a completely unfeasible and chimerical program. Beginning in 1932, the A.F.L. leaders resorted to a series of measures designed to bolster the prestige of the Federation in the eyes of the workers. Also playing a role here was the fact that in 1932 big business began making serious inroads into the living standard of skilled workers in A.F.L. unions who had previously occupied a privileged position. All this compelled the A.F.L. leaders to endorse unemployment insurance and come out against wage cuts.

This "shift to the left" did not signify any radical change in the ideological baggage of the Gompersites. They had to face the fact, however, that the narrow trade union philosophy formulated by Gompers in the 1880s was becoming less meaningful and attractive. John Frey wrote that the leaders of the A.F.L. had tried so long to be "good guys", that they almost stopped having any value. The struggle between the progressive and the reactionary trends in the American labor movement was being felt more and more. The economic crisis deepened the chasm between the class of wage-workers and the class of capitalists, promoting increased class consciousness among American workers. With growing frequency old reformist A.F.L. unions fell apart and new independent unions arose and energetically, albeit disconnectedly, defended the economic and social rights of the American working class.

The influence of the progressive T.U.U.L. grew, and by the end of 1933 its membership had reached 100,000.<sup>1</sup> During the years of the crisis, when the A.F.L. leaders submissively

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism. Principles and Organization, Strategy and Tactics*, New York, 1947, p. 199.



consented to wage cuts and did everything possible to prevent the development of a mass movement of unemployed, the T.U.U.L. trade unions proclaimed their basic goal to be the creation of a labor front to resist the capitalists. The T.U.U.L. program met the vital interests of the American working class. It stressed proletarian class struggle, worker solidarity, trade union democracy, racial equality, struggle for social progress and strong industrial unions. Through selfless and courageous work, the T.U.U.L. aroused the spirit of rebellion in the labor movement, rebellion against the stagnation and the ideology of servility and class collaboration that were being instilled among the workers by the Gompersites. Thanks to the efforts of the T.U.U.L. some A.F.L. unions adopted a more constructive position on important domestic political issues in keeping with the spirit of the times.

#### CHAPTER IX

### THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ANTI-LABOR LEGISLATION

Conditions during the 1929-1933 period were extremely complicated and unfavorable for labor's strike movement. Half of the nation's industrial workers were unemployed. This acted like a lead ball attached to the feet of the workers who still held jobs, hindering them in their struggle for higher wages, trade union recognition and the abolition of archaic labor laws. It was virtually impossible to organize the employed and unemployed for joint struggle because of the small proportion of unionized workers, the extremely limited range of union influence, and the hostility of the A.F.L. leaders to any ideas coming from the left wing of the labor movement. The progressive T.U.U.L. unions tried to surmount this lack of unity, but the sphere of their activity lay mainly in the consumer goods industries (needle trades, textile, leather, food, etc.). They were also active in organizing worker resistance to big business pressure in the basic industries: coal, auto and steel. But here they were met with fierce violence on the part of the employers, the police and the Gompersites. All this affected the character and scope of the strike movement during those years.

The dynamics of the strike struggle during the period 1929-1933 looked as follows<sup>1</sup>:

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Number of strikes	921	637	810	841	1,695
Participants	288,572	182,975	341,817	324,210	1,168,272
Man-days lost (millions)	5.3	3.3	6.9	10.5	16.9

In the first two years of the crisis period the strike movement was almost exclusively defensive in character. Strikes were called mainly to protest wage cuts. The proportion of big strikes in the total number of strikes fell considerably (from 6.8 to 4.9 percent for strikes involving 1,000 to 5,000 workers, and from 0.8 to 0.34 percent for strikes of 5,000 to 10,000 workers). The reason was that workers at large enterprises in the basic industries did not take part in strikes. The bulk of the strikes were at small companies with small numbers of participants, which meant fragmentation of strike action. Many strikes were called to demand the right to organize. This became a characteristic feature of the strike movement throughout the first half of the 1930s.

The needle workers, textile workers and miners were in the vanguard of the strike movement during the crisis period. The 1929 and 1930 textile workers' strikes in the South were highly critical: the Elizabethton, Tenn., Gastonia, N. C., and Marion, S.C., strikes went down in the history of the U.S. labor movement as examples of extraordinary perseverance and the gradual build-up of organized resistance by formerly backward sections of the working class, among whom were many recent newcomers from the farm belt of the South. It

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Strikes in the United States, 1880-1936*, by F. Peterson, Washington, 1938 (hereafter referred to as *Strikes...*); Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, *Organized Labor*. New York and London, 1945, pp. 692, 700, 701, 703.

was during the strikes in the South that the National Textile Workers Union, headed by Communists, first emerged as an organizing and leading force.

The next stage—1931 and 1932—was marked by somewhat heightened strike activity. The number of strikes and strikers grew. After the decline in 1930, the following two years served as a stepping stone to the great wave of strikes that began in the second half of 1933, when the numbers involved were no longer counted in hundreds of thousands, but in millions. A distinctive feature of the strike movement in 1931 and 1932 was the greater number of big strikes involving 10,000 or more workers. The period saw 12 such strikes, as compared with three in the two preceding years. Another important feature was the heightened role of the progressive T.U.U.L. unions.

At the peak of the crisis the number of strikes was still relatively small, but increasingly apparent was a trend toward mass strikes involving workers from several enterprises and sometimes even all the enterprises in a number of industrial centers. Strikes in heavy industry increased in number, and those in the coal regions of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky were especially tense. On the whole, however, this was a period of quietly gathering strength.

The strike movement during the crisis period was also characterized by worker resistance to the tyranny of the courts, specifically to the use of the injunction. The Communist Party and the T.U.U.L. took a most active part in this struggle. Many strikes began and continued in defiance of court injunctions. The ease with which employers could resort to the courts to deprive workers of the right to strike provoked increasing dissatisfaction and indignation among the workers. They demanded that the injunction be outlawed. Congress could not afford to ignore these demands. Senator Norris and Representative Fiorello La Guardia introduced a bill (1930) that would restrict the intervention of the courts in labor disputes. Under the pressure of the membership, the A.F.L. leaders also were forced, at the Toronto convention (October 1929), to approve a resolution demanding that the power of the federal courts to issue injunctions against trade union activity and strikes be limited. An A.F.L. convention in Boston in October 1930



adopted a similar resolution, and it was confirmed later at the 51st A.F.L. convention in Vancouver in 1931.

In April 1930, Governor Franklin Roosevelt of New York signed a state law that was close in spirit to the Norris-La Guardia bill. In a number of states—Wisconsin, Ohio, Arizona, Colorado and Oregon—the first timid steps were taken toward granting labor organizations broader rights.

The Senate passed the Norris-La Guardia bill in February 1932, by a vote of 72 to 5. It should be noted that many congressmen decided to vote for the bill only after receiving assurances of A.F.L. "loyalty". The Norris-La Guardia Act introduced certain democratic changes in the regulation of labor relations. It was a step (albeit wavering and tardy) along the way of legalizing trade union activity. The law gave workers the right to organize into trade unions of their choice, and officially guaranteed the right to strike, picket and raise funds. The fourth section of the Act proclaimed that no federal court had the right to issue an injunction in a labor dispute if the dispute did not involve conduct defined as "illegal".

With all its positive significance, the Norris-La Guardia Act left many loopholes through which employers could get court injunctions against trade union activities. No special mechanism was created under the Act to prevent employers from interfering in trade union affairs. The law dealt largely with limiting the jurisdiction of the courts in labor disputes rather than guaranteeing the rights of trade unions. The main thing was that the law was applicable only to federal courts. No one had prohibited the state courts from issuing injunctions to keep workers from organizing, hamper the strike movement or prevent the normal functioning of trade unions. Moreover, the law was not recognized as constitutional until about 1938.

Nevertheless, it was a gain for the workers, an important result of their long struggle. It was no accident that Senator Norris later wrote that the decisive actions in getting the law passed came from the working people, who with increasing acuity perceived the factor of inequality inherent in the economic structure of the society. In 1933, U.M.W. president John L. Lewis said after many exhausting years of political effort, labor had succeeded in outlawing "yellow dog"

contracts.<sup>1</sup> Thenceforth, employers could no longer enjoy the support of the federal courts in defending the notorious sanctity of contracts that imposed lowered wages on workers. The labor movement was the only force that could be relied upon to defend and further the development of the major principles of progressive labor relations.

The American labor movement in the crisis years painfully overcame the consequences of nearly a decade of stagnation, and showed a definite inclination toward nation-wide expression. This was confirmed in the elections of 1932 when the overwhelming majority of workers voted against the bankrupt policies of the Hoover Administration.

The revival in the American labor movement of a sense of social responsibility soon brought about a second, truly important, political victory. The growing numbers of destitute and the upsurge in the struggle of farmers and unemployed workers, combined with ferment in the middle strata, brought about a general political crisis by the autumn of 1932. E. K. Lindley, a well-known American journalist who was close to Franklin D. Roosevelt, wrote in his book *The Roosevelt Revolution. First Phase*: "Probably there was no realistic observer in November 1932 who thought the existing social system could survive a second winter unless substantial recovery set in."<sup>2</sup>

Historian Alfred Rollins conveyed in a few words the atmosphere in the second half of that year: "That winter, depression had stalked more deeply each day into the heart of America. Hoover's desperate hope that the corner had been turned had been cruelly shattered by the vaulting unemployment statistics, by the rumbling undertones of discontent which broke into evil maelstroms of violence. In the farm country the accelerating tempo of the mobs hinted of revolution. On the city streets one could read the dangerous impatience of despair in hungry, hopeless faces. Governors

<sup>1</sup> Contracts under which workers had to agree not to join a labor union.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest K. Lindley, *The Roosevelt Revolution. First Phase*, London, 1934, p. 42.

and Mayors, bankers and industrialists whispered uneasily of 'Red Armies', of the need for toughness."<sup>1</sup>

In order to paralyze the movement of workers and farmers, the ideological and political leaders of the bourgeoisie resorted to reforms—a tested means, but long unpopular among the big bourgeoisie. There was increasing talk of the need for active government intervention in the matter of relief and social security. The acknowledged leader of the influential wing of the bourgeoisie which favored changing the course of domestic policy was the Governor of New York, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. But in 1932 neither Roosevelt nor those who backed him had a definite program of economic reconstruction and relief. The word "experiment" was often heard during his presidential campaign. The only thing that seemed clear to everyone was the need to act and act fast to prevent an inevitable catastrophe. Roosevelt felt that the worsening position of the masses was the main source of a growing nation-wide crisis fraught with the worst possible consequences for the ruling class. "Our real enemies are hunger, want, insecurity, poverty and fear," he said during the 1932 election campaign.<sup>2</sup>

The Democrats built their campaign not only around attacks on the bankrupt Republican Administration, but also around the burning issues of the day. The Democratic Party convention advocated increasing federal funds to the states to provide unemployment relief and expand public works. The Democratic platform contained a point supporting demands for unemployment insurance and old-age pensions, to be regulated in accordance with state laws. Although the Democrats advocated a more flexible policy on labor legislation, there were no essential differences in the economic programs of the two bourgeois parties. The vagueness of many proposals of the Democrats, the predominance of pre-election rhetoric over sober economic thinking, and the lack of any convincing example that the Democrats had successfully coped with problems in those states where they held power (including New

<sup>1</sup> Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., *Roosevelt and Howe*, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> F. D. Roosevelt, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. I, New York, 1938, p. 862.

York), explained the restraint shown by the labor press in supporting Franklin Roosevelt's candidacy. It also explains the position of the Communist Party, which sharply criticized the Democratic Party platform during the campaign.

In contrast to the bourgeois parties and reformists, the communist platform advanced a clear and precise program to meet the vital interests of the popular masses. The Communists, with William Z. Foster as their presidential candidate, demanded comprehensive social insurance at the expense of the state and the employers, an end to wage cuts, immediate government aid to farmers, equal rights for Negroes, a halt to police terror against labor organizations, defense of the Chinese revolution, and recognition of the Soviet Union.

One notable feature of the political situation was the considerable interest shown by the American people in the Soviet Union and its successes in economic construction. The press noted that this interest was connected with the effective demonstration by the Soviet Union of the possibilities for crisis-free development on the basis of a planned economy, which pursued as its goal the growth of the general welfare rather than the extraction of capitalist profit.

Awareness of the historical significance of the events taking place in Soviet Russia grew among progressive American workers. The labor press wrote about the interest displayed by the labor community in the "Russian miracle", in the gigantic socialist building going on in the U.S.S.R., the aim of which was to abolish social inequality—the source of crises, poverty, hunger and insecurity of millions of people. Along with this interest, the conviction grew that friendly economic relations could and should be established between the two great countries, which would shore up the industrial potential of the United States and thereby help stimulate business activity in the country. Hundreds of resolutions were heard at major trade union meetings and conventions demanding an end to the Hoover Administration's policy of diplomatic isolation of the U.S.S.R. During his election campaign in 1932, Roosevelt deemed it necessary to heed these mounting voices and let it be understood that if he were elected, the foreign policy course of the nation would be re-examined.



As the elections neared, Roosevelt's popularity grew, due primarily to his promises to improve the lot of "the forgotten man". In his speeches, he frequently referred to the question of unemployment relief and hinted that his new administration would satisfy the demands of the trade unions for shorter hours, expansion of public works, etc. The Democratic leadership established contact with a number of trade unions, and many of them pledged their support of Roosevelt at election time. The Railroad Brotherhoods and the United Textile Workers Union waged a vigorous pro-Roosevelt campaign, and the sympathies of Sidney Hillman and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America which he headed were also on his side.

The A.F.L. leadership, while remaining officially "non-partisan", made a veiled appeal at the 1931 convention in Vancouver for efforts to defeat the incumbent candidates at the presidential elections. The A.F.L. proposals for labor legislation reform submitted in the summer of 1932 for the consideration of the Republican and Democratic conventions, contained nothing acceptable to Hoover.

Roosevelt, on the contrary, regarded the A.F.L. recommendations favorably. His residence was flooded with mail from ordinary people. The question most frequently asked was, in his words, about his position "in relation to the duty of the Federal and State and local governments to provide funds and aid for the relief of those out of work".<sup>1</sup>

In the November 1932 presidential election, Roosevelt received an overwhelming majority of the votes. The results indicated the undiminished strength of bourgeois influence on the working people of America, the ingenuity of the American bourgeoisie and its ability to use the two-party system to preserve its own dominance.

The mass actions between 1929 and 1932 brought about a broad, although fragile, coalition of democratic and progressive forces which was to ensure Roosevelt's first impressive victory.

<sup>1</sup> *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, Vol. 135, October 22, 1932, p. 2756.

On March 4, 1933, inauguration day, the newspaper of the organizations of the unemployed in Chicago published an open letter to the new President. The letter spoke of the rampant unemployment and the resulting poverty and malnutrition as a national calamity that required immediate action on the part of the government. It urged the President to convene a special session of the Congress to discuss a list of demands which included: an immediate increase of direct aid to the unemployed; adoption of a program of public works and cleaning up the slums, adoption of legislation providing for unemployment relief and establishment of a national network of unemployment relief offices; reduction of work hours with no wage cuts involved; old-age pensions that would allow the aged to retire securely; and adoption of a legislation prohibiting child labor and providing adequate living conditions for the children. The letter said in conclusion that the nation would be unable to achieve complete conciliation until society guaranteed every worker security, freedom, the right to work and above all a fair share in the products of his labor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, *New Frontier*, March 4, 1933.

## CHAPTER X

**ROOSEVELT ADMINISTRATION LABOR POLICIES  
DURING THE NEW DEAL**

Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration as the President of the United States coincided with the appearance of new omens of a general paralysis of the financial system. A massive run on the banks had begun. In order to stop the panic, a number of states ordered the banks to close and freeze their assets. First Michigan did this, then Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, California and Texas. By the day Roosevelt assumed office, the banks in most of the states had been closed. Municipal funds were frozen everywhere. Schools were shut down because of lack of funds. Retail stores, factories and mines were not in a position to pay wages to their employees. Discontent reigned.

The new President understood that to gain control over the situation he had to make pledges and take emergency measures without delay. The government had to win time. This is what Roosevelt was aiming for when he delivered his masterfully written speech to a gloomy crowd in Washington on the cloudy day of March 4, 1933. The new President displayed extraordinary composure as he urged the country not to succumb to the temptation of resorting to a "revolution of despair". Henceforth, the President announced, the country

would get a "new deal", and its government would keep in mind constantly the needs of ordinary Americans, not the big-wigs from Wall Street, but ordinary working people living on the farms and standing at the lathes.

Roosevelt became the symbol of change in government policy. But the New Deal was much more than Roosevelt. "It was, above all, a great social movement which projected democratic answers to the plans for ruthless exploitation and fascism with which many business leaders in the 30s expected to weather the economic crisis.... Even more significant than the New Deal program was the movement which fought for it and left its stamp on the whole period."<sup>1</sup>

American workers had to start almost from scratch. Social legislation in the U.S.A., laws on labor protection and social security were literally in the embryo stage. For many decades, bourgeois legislators and the courts, employers and right-wing labor leaders considered any government regulation of labor relations undesirable. Any bill on labor protection was ruled as unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

The struggle of the working class was always the major factor in the social progress of the United States. A shift in the balance of forces (in one direction or the other) immediately had an effect on the rate of progress and its character. At the same time, at a certain point, an external factor also began to play a role. The progress achieved during the New Deal years was connected not only with the upsurge of struggle of the country's democratic forces against concrete social evils; new incentives for changes appeared both for workers and for liberal bourgeois politicians.

It is generally acknowledged that the establishment of socialist production relations in Soviet Russia and the great

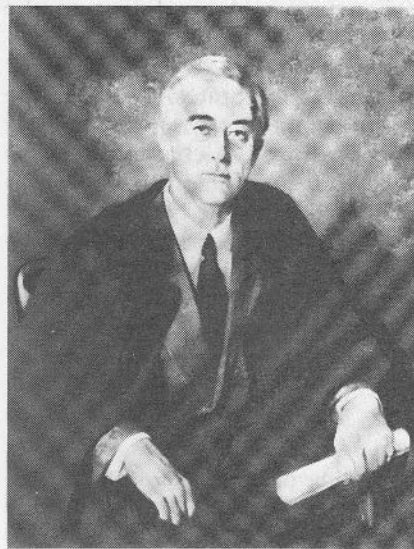
<sup>1</sup> *The Worker*, April 3, 1955, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> The crux of the Amendment lies in the phrase: "...nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law". In 1886, the scope of the Amendment was widened by interpreting the term "person" as applicable to corporate as well as natural persons. This interpretation, with extension of the "due process of law" phrase, limited state legislation aimed at control of corporations and other social and economic regulation (*Dictionary of American History*, Volume II, New York, 1942, p. 317).



democratic principles and guarantees embodied in Soviet laws, as V. I. Lenin said, affected, to one extent or another, "all imperialist countries".<sup>1</sup> The Soviet state made history in the field of labor legislation and this, by way of example, created a favorable political climate for the struggle of the proletariat in other countries. On the other hand, the world bourgeoisie, emerging from revolutionary storms and haunted by specters of "Bolshevist Revolution", hastened to strengthen its positions by means of reforms and concessions in the hope of ensuring social tranquillity. This became a universal phenomenon, extending also to America, where monopoly capital, by virtue of its exceptionally advantageous position, was not predisposed to carrying out major reforms. Individual U.S. monopolies, however, did resort to partial concessions and the bribing of certain segments of the working class.

After announcing his intention to pursue a policy of economic recovery, President Roosevelt had to determine



13. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States (1933-1945)

immediately his attitude to the labor union agitation for very radical social transformations, in particular, the demand calling for a legislated 30-hour week in industry. Some influential liberal politicians, like Senator Hugo Black, sided with the demands of the unions. The intention of the advocates of a 30-hour week was to achieve an equal distribution of employment by turning the fully employed and fully unemployed into approximately equal semi-employed. Explaining the position of the A.F.L. to the employers, William Green said that

there was a growing feeling of restlessness throughout the country caused by the inability to provide jobs for the jobless. When the masses are refused that to which they have a right, the time ultimately comes when they try to exercise their right by force. He said that a revolutionary spirit was growing. By proposing to introduce the 30-hour week, he said, the A.F.L. was trying to remove the main cause of discontent. If the employers preferred a constructive disciplined labor movement to a movement bent on achieving a new economic and social system by destructive methods, they must actively support the American Federation of Labor in its efforts toward orderly progress.

Right up to the autumn of 1932, the "laissez-faire" elements of the A.F.L. stubbornly refused to acknowledge any government regulation of the workweek. Then at the same Cincinnati convention that adopted a resolution demanding the introduction of unemployment insurance, representatives also voted to support a bill for a six-hour day and a five-day week. Soon after, Senator Hugo Black and Representative Lawrence Connery introduced into both houses of Congress a bill designed to establish the 30-hour week. However, the new administration strongly opposed the Black-Connery bill. It was aware of the highly negative attitude of big business to that bill, and simply scuttled it with a hastily proposed law on industrial recovery.

The aims of the National Industrial Recovery Act (N.I.R.A.) signed by the President on June 16, 1933, were formulated in Section 1, which was in the nature of a general declaration:

"Section 1. A national emergency productive of widespread unemployment and disorganization of industry, which burdens interstate and foreign commerce, affects the public welfare, and undermines the standards of living of the American people, is hereby declared to exist. It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress to remove obstructions to the free flow of interstate and foreign commerce which tend to diminish the amount thereof; and to provide for the general welfare by promoting the organization of industry for the purpose of cooperative action among trade groups, to induce and maintain united action of labor management under

<sup>1</sup> See, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 157.

adequate governmental sanctions and supervisions, to eliminate unfair competitive practices, to promote the fullest possible utilization of the present productive capacity of industries, to avoid undue restrictions of production (except as may be temporarily required), to increase the consumption of industrial and agricultural products by increasing purchasing power, to reduce and relieve unemployment, to improve standards of labor, and otherwise to rehabilitate industry and to conserve natural resources."<sup>1</sup>

It was decided to stabilize the commodity market through the mandatory cartelization of industry. The frightening picture of millions of unemployed prompted the government to support a mandatory reduction of work time and a planned distribution of work. As part of the measures to increase employment and consumer purchasing and eliminate ruinous competition, the various industries were called upon to regulate themselves according to codes of fair competition. It was assumed that under government supervision every industry could renew its strength by introducing "fair" and strictly controlled production and sales, and also by fixing the level of commodity prices. To do this, it was suggested that the trade unions and government join industrialists in coordinating the minimum wage and maximum workday. Final approval of the codes worked out for each industry rested in the hands of the President. Once signed by the President, the codes became law for the employers. Their violation was a violation of the law with all ensuing consequences.

Without waiting out the lengthy procedure of drawing up codes for each industry the government offered its model code (blanket code) which could be applied to any industry as a temporary means of stimulating business activity. The blanket code set a maximum 44-hour week and a minimum weekly wage of from \$12 to \$15 for white-collar workers. For industrial workers somewhat different indices were set: a 35-hour week and a wage of from 30 to 40 cents per hour. Little by little, all industries drew up codes, which were to remain in effect for varying lengths of time. In 1935, the

<sup>1</sup> Lois MacDonald, Gladys L. Palmer, Theresa Wolfson, *Labor and the N.R.A.*, New York, 1934, p. 8.

A.F.L. executive council counted about 550 working codes, embracing 90 percent of business and industry.

The very first meetings on drawing up codes for various branches of industry clearly showed that the workers and the employer associations were on unequal terms. Everywhere, the responsibility for preparing the draft codes was assumed by the latter. From the outset, the participation of trade unions was envisaged only in the form of criticism and the introduction of amendments. Unorganized workers, who were in the absolute majority, had no voice in the matter. In those very rare cases when trade union representatives (for example, from the textile workers and needle trade unions) were invited to code-making conferences, the capitalists actually controlled the whole process.

For its part, the government did not insist on the principle of equal rights in drawing up the codes. General Hugh S. Johnson, head of the National Recovery Administration, said unequivocally that the law could not be used as an instrument to defend the interests of organized labor. This was made manifest in the code formulated for the automobile industry, signed on August 26 by President Roosevelt, which contained a number of points absolutely unacceptable to the workers.

Many trade unions did not conceal their disappointment in not being able to reach a reciprocal compromise with the employers' associations with the help of government mediators.

The abuses of the employers in drawing up the codes were so numerous that they drew bitter reproaches from the usually silent and submissive trade union leaders. While noting the obvious positive results of Roosevelt's program for industrial recovery, the A.F.L. leadership stated in its report to a convention in Atlantic City (1935) that workers did not have a voice in formulating the codes, nor in their regulation or, if need be, amendment.

Yet, it would be wrong to overlook the gain, however small, to individual groups of workers resulting from the regulation of labor conditions within the framework of the codes. The textile workers of the South, for example, benefited from a shortening of their workweek, which had reached 65 hours or



more. The codes helped bring about some increase of jobs in certain industries.

It was not long before the workers came to realize that the implementation of the New Deal reforms depended wholly on them, through organized struggle against big business. But the struggle for better working conditions required, first of all, that the workers themselves be organized. This, as it turned out, was not such an easy matter, although the right to organize into trade unions now was guaranteed by law, especially section 7 (a) of the N.I.R.A.

The new law stipulated that every "fair competition code" must include the following provisions: 1) that employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing and to engage in concerted activities, for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection, and that they shall be fully protected against interference, restraint, or coercion by employers and their agents in the exercise of these rights; 2) that no employee or any person seeking employment shall have to comply with the demand of joining a company union or giving up his right to join labor organization of his choosing; and 3) that employers shall act in accordance with the maximum work hours, minimum wages and other conditions of hire approved and recommended by the U.S. President.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, Section 7(a) was a brief and apparently clear-cut declaration of the aims of the government's labor policy. In fact, the paragraph contained only a vague definition of what was actually meant by collective bargaining and what kind of worker organization was empowered to negotiate. The omissions and contradictions in Section 7(a) were useful to the employers and corporations in furthering their own interests.

The second big problem that the new administration had to deal with was unemployment. The New Deal leaders felt they could solve it by immediately increasing direct relief and promoting a system of public works. Special agencies were created for this purpose, including the Public Works Administration (P.W.A.), the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) and

<sup>1</sup> See, Statutes at Large of the United States of America, XLVIII, p. 195.

the Civil Works Administration. These administrations were headed by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and President Roosevelt's closest adviser Harry Hopkins. Unemployment was so great, however, that many who had been dealing directly with the problem were very skeptical of the efficacy of even such a sum as the \$3,300 million appropriated for relief. It should be said in all justice, however, that the appropriations made by Roosevelt's Administration to assist the unemployed exceeded any previously made. The measures at least kept the situation in check.

What real changes took place in the nation's economic development and the living standard of the working class in the first years of the New Deal?

The most important result was that the economy began to crawl out of the crisis. However, the recovery was not a consistent process. Suffice it to say that the industrial production index rose to 100 by July 1933 (1923-1925—100, 1929—119), but again dropped to 72 by November of the year. Not until 1935 did the recovery process become relatively stable and the index of industrial production reach the 1923-1925 level. This, in general, was the picture of the development of industrial production in the period 1929-1935. The revitalization of industry did not result in the expected increase in the living standard of the working people. According to official figures, unemployment continued to remain at 11 million during 1935.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest economic benefits from "production regulation" went to the corporations. In the first nine months of 1934 alone, the profits of industrial companies increased 76 percent over the corresponding figure for 1933.<sup>2</sup> While the N.I.R.A. was in effect (1933-1935) the average weekly wage for industrial workers had increased by roughly eight percent (to \$21.86). The average annual income of workers in the mining, manufacturing and construction industries increased from \$874 in 1933 to \$1,068 in 1935.<sup>3</sup> Other statistics, which took unemployment into account, showed that the average annual

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1954, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Goldman et al., *Strikes Under the New Deal*, New York, 1935, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Broadus Mitchell, *Depression Decade from New Era Through New Deal 1929-1941*, New York-Toronto, 1947, p. 286.

earnings of the American worker were \$613 in 1934 and \$682 in 1935.<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment was somewhat alleviated. Direct government subsidies to businessmen helped activate the economy to a certain extent. Thousands of people found jobs laying railroad tracks. The federal government turned over large funds to the states and cities to provide relief to the families of unemployed. New York was one example of progress in relief administration, where in 1937 the cash allowance for the family of an unemployed person was doubled. In order to put a limit on evictions, the city paid rent to landlords in the sum of \$7.8 million in 1933.

Wherever there was significant mass struggle, where the unemployed succeeded in forming their own organizations, and where trade unions were active, the working people achieved tangible results. However, wherever the labor movement remained demoralized, the New Deal brought nothing except hope for change. In most cases, unemployment relief remained insignificant, often only symbolic.

The basic demand of the masses was not satisfied. Millions of families suffering from unemployment assumed that with the advent of a new president the government would exert efforts to provide unemployment relief on a permanent basis. The deluge of mail to Roosevelt and Secretary of Labor Perkins testified to a broad movement in favor of a comprehensive system of unemployment insurance. On its part, the Administration was not revoking its commitment with respect to working out an acceptable system of unemployment insurance, and yet made no haste to fulfill it.

In 1932, the Communist Party had drawn up and submitted a draft bill on unemployment insurance. In February 1934, it was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Ernest Lundeen of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. The bill proposed a federal system of unemployment insurance with benefits equalling the average wage to be paid throughout the entire period of unemployment. It further proposed a federal insurance fund financed by a higher tax rate on high incomes. The C.P. proposed that the entire system

<sup>1</sup> S. Bell, *Productivity, Wages, and National Income*, Washington, 1940, p. 21.

be controlled by a special body composed of labor and farmer representatives.<sup>1</sup>

By the autumn of 1934, the C.P. bill was supported by a large number of influential A.F.L. unions. The labor federations in the states of Montana, Iowa and Colorado, the city labor councils of Milwaukee, St. Louis and Toledo, the International Union of Miners and Smelters, the Textile Workers Union of America and others all felt that the principles proposed by the C.P. should become the basis of a national system of unemployment insurance. At the same time, the A.F.L. executive council circulated a letter to all affiliates and central labor councils in large industrial centers declaring the communist draft bill to be "unconstitutional", and proposed to support a bill on social insurance introduced in Congress in 1934 by Senator Robert F. Wagner. The Wagner bill had many weak points, the main one being that the entire burden was to be borne by the states, which, at their own discretion, were to determine the size of the benefits and other conditions. Despite these obvious defects, the Socialist Party also supported the Wagner bill, loudly calling for "realism". However, organizations of unemployed, which were usually under the influence of the Socialists, including the largest ones (in Chicago and New York), supported the communist bill. The National League of Unemployed, controlled by the Conference for Progressive Labor Action, took the same position.

The scattered nature of the unemployed movement, the isolation of its various centers, and recurrent friction and squabbling, hampered the unification of the masses and the organization of a new offensive, the need for which was obvious. Trends toward unification were growing stronger, but the unification itself was moving slowly.

Among the major efforts of the unemployed councils in the period 1933-1935 were a series of hunger marches. Especially outstanding were marches of jobless in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia (November 1933), a demonstration of unemployed organized by the federation of unions of unemployed in Illinois. On the day of Roosevelt's inauguration, the Communist Party organized a demonstration of unemployed in Detroit

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, July 25, 1933.



(2,500 participants) and in Chicago (8,000). In most cases the slogans of the unemployed movement were in the center of the general political actions of the American working people, be they the traditional May Day demonstrations, actions in defense of democracy, or protests against reaction at home or fascism abroad. The May Day demonstrations of workers and unemployed which took place in New York and many other cities in 1933 were outstanding in size and spirit of solidarity. Over 100,000 persons gathered in New York's Union Square. Meetings with many thousands of participants were held in Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, Baltimore and elsewhere.

In many places the struggle for social insurance and relief prompted people to search for a way out of the crisis along the lines of radical social and economic changes. Ideologically, this phenomenon was expressed in various forms, sometimes reflecting the influence of proletarian socialism, sometimes representing an eclectic combination of bits of various utopian theories and petty-bourgeois slogans. Common to them all, however, were anti-monopoly sentiments.

California was one of the centers of the unemployed movement where the anti-capitalist trends were more and more strongly felt. The acknowledged leader and spiritual father of a unique movement there was the great American writer Upton Sinclair. He came forth with a theory according to which both workers and capitalists suffered equally from the vicissitudes of the economic situation, and his axiom was the thesis that there was an identity of interests between the rich and the poor. Hence the character of the solutions he preached. He held that it would be easy to save democracy and provide the unemployed with jobs if all strata of society consciously and voluntarily agreed to a social experiment in creating a new society on cooperative foundations. Without going into the economic details, Sinclair outlined his credo in 12 points, which became the program of a movement which came to be called End Poverty in California (EPIC).

Sinclair considered the most important thing to be to draw all of California's unemployed, both in industry and agriculture, into a process of non-profit-making production. If this were achieved, Sinclair said, then the society would be purged

and ennobled and consequently put on the tracks of economic and moral cooperation for the sake of the welfare of each. How was this to be accomplished?

He proposed to organize labor colonies on unused land where the unemployed could raise agricultural products. The idle factories in the cities would also be turned over to the unemployed, who could produce consumer goods for themselves and their brothers in the farm colonies.

Sinclair's platform envisaged a substantial increase in taxes on high incomes and higher property and inheritance taxes, as well as a special tax on public utilities corporations. Small homeowners, Sinclair felt, should not have to pay a property tax.

The EPIC plan contained many elements of utopian socialism, compounded by ordinary petty-bourgeois hare-brained ideas. At its core was the naive and thoroughly archaic notion that a separate system of non-profit-making production and exchange could develop successfully within the framework of the capitalist system.

Like the attempts of petty-bourgeois socialists of the nineteenth century to organize the "fair" barter of products among producers, the Sinclair plan for a system of direct commodity exchange would have inevitably failed had it been launched. At the same time, the positive side to the social movement headed by Sinclair should not be ignored; it was anti-capitalist in character, it had a mass base and went under the banner of democracy and social progress.

Sinclair sincerely believed that he would be able to win the majority of the voters in the state over to the side of EPIC and that once he won in the 1934 gubernatorial election he would embark on the cooperative scheme. He decided to use the Democratic Party election machine for this purpose. His supporters were heartened by the fact that many influential A.F.L. unions, while giving no clear indication of their stance toward the EPIC plan, supported Sinclair for governor. Especially active support for Sinclair came from so-called Utopian societies that had sprung up all over California and had a following among unemployed and employed alike. Their program was somewhat similar to Sinclair's plan of "social

reorganization". Employers were extremely hostile to members of these societies, and discriminated against them in hiring and firing.

Big business was dead set against Sinclair and fought fiercely to defeat him at the polls. Many owners threatened to shut down their factories if he was elected, and to take their capital out of the state. Sinclair's supporters did everything to stress the fundamental similarity between their proposed plan for economic changes and Roosevelt's recovery program. Sinclair demonstratively quit the Socialist Party, firmly associated himself with the Democratic election machine in an effort to become the Democratic Party candidate for governor, and strove to win the support of Roosevelt himself. Not long before the November congressional elections (1934), Sinclair met with Roosevelt and was surprised at how extremely well-informed he was about the developments in California.

The EPIC movement reached its peak in late summer and autumn 1934. It passed its first test in August when Sinclair received an absolute majority of votes in the primary election and became the Democratic Party candidate for governor. The convention delegates, impressed by the scope of the mass movement, voted unanimously for a platform that was unprecedented in the history of the country's bourgeois parties. The Democrats promised to provide jobs for all unemployed by implementing Sinclair's plan, support the "self-help" groups, launch a broad public works program, finance ruined farmers and homeowners so that they could redeem their property, socialize all oil pipe-lines, and introduce a six-hour day and five-day week.

For their part, the Republicans and the middle and big bourgeoisie that stood behind them decided not to repeat the mistakes Hoover had made in 1932, and generously assured the voters that they fully supported the demands of the unemployed for relief, that they would organize a wide network of public works, reduce taxes, establish an old-age pension system, declare a moratorium on debts and even pass a law for a six-hour day.

Sinclair also became increasingly dangerous in the eyes of Democratic leaders in Washington. He was veering too far to the left. The pillars of the New Deal, including Roosevelt,

followed the mounting mass movement in California and Sinclair's progress toward the governorship with increasing anxiety. James A. Farley, coming to California on a special mission, prepared the ground for the undermining of Sinclair's influence with the Democratic Party. After that, Democrats who had supported Sinclair and even some to whom he had promised posts in his administration in anticipation of victory began to abandon him. EPIC had little financial support, while its opponent had vast financial backing. The leaders of the big bourgeoisie deftly borrowed many of the EPIC slogans and induced the reactionary Republican candidate for governor, Marriam, to adopt a program better suited to the situation. On top of everything else, President Roosevelt publicly dissociated himself from Sinclair's reform program and through his conduct generally showed that he was at least quite indifferent to EPIC's goals. Actually, Roosevelt supported Marriam, regarding him as the only one who could defeat the dangerous trend embodied in EPIC.

The election results were 1,138,000 votes for Marriam and 879,000 for Sinclair, 302,000 for the leader of the Progressives, and about 10,000 for the Communists and Socialists. November 1934 was the high point in the development of the EPIC movement. After that it began to decline.

The struggle of the unemployed, workers and democratically-minded petty bourgeoisie under the EPIC banner became an important factor not only in California's political life but also far beyond the bounds of the state. Within California it served as an important spur to liberal reforms.



## CHAPTER XI

THE UPSURGE IN THE STRIKE AND  
LABOR UNION MOVEMENT (1933-35)

An important feature in the development of the labor movement in those years was the growth of the strike struggle, often affecting entire industries. Over a million American workers struck in 1933 to improve their conditions and secure the right to organize. In the summer of that year Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins announced that industry was witnessing the biggest upsurge in the strike struggle since the miners' general strikes in 1922. But that was only the beginning. In the following year the strike movement kept mounting, as the following figures show.<sup>1</sup>

	1933	1934	1935
Work Stoppages	1,695	1,856	2,014
Workers Involved (in thousands)	1,170	1,470	1,120
Man-Days Idle	16,900	19,600	15,500

Joining the struggle were tens of thousands of workers in the auto industry (Detroit, Toledo), textile workers (Fall River), miners (Alabama, West Virginia, Pennsylvania), longshoremen on the West Coast, construction workers, workers in aluminum enterprises, taxi drivers in Philadelphia and New York, needle

workers in New York, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Cleveland; shoe workers in Lynn, Massachusetts, etc. In contrast with the previous period, the strikes were offensive in character. The workers were fighting for higher wages, shorter hours with no cut in wages, and most important, for union recognition. In a number of strikes, the workers stood up for their right to take part in drawing up the codes, and in others they fought against codes dictated by the monopolies. In 1933, sympathy strikes broke out occasionally in the auto manufacturing districts. All this was evidence that the country was at the threshold of a series of general strikes which were to play an outstanding role in the history of the American labor movement.

In May 1934, a broad movement against company unions, which nearly developed into a general strike, was launched in Toledo, Ohio. The pioneers were the workers in the auto industry who demanded recognition of the union they had formed, and a wage increase. Organizations of the unemployed supported the strikers, and most of the labor unions in the city responded to the Communists' call for a general strike. The Toledo central labor council set up a strike committee to conduct a general strike. A massive demonstration in support of a general strike was held in the city. When the National Guards was called in to evict the strikers from the premises of an auto electrical equipment plant, a bloody clash ensued. Met with a hail of rocks, the National Guards fired several volleys into the crowd of strikers. Two workers were killed, many were wounded. Only the intervention of federal authorities and concessions made by the employers prevented a general strike.

Almost simultaneously, a strike broke out in Minneapolis, the largest industrial, financial and commercial center in the Mid-West and a trans-shipping center where transportation arteries from all directions converged. Its life depended above all on those who were employed in the trucking industry, that is, on truck drivers. The latter, taking advantage of the right granted them under Section 7 of the N.I.R.A., decided to form a local of the teamsters' union. The reactionary bourgeoisie organized a Joint City Council to oppose this move, and called for the creation of a "mass citizen" movement and a "citizens' army" to prevent a victory of the close shop in the city. In the

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 99.

meantime, the teamsters' union was preparing for a strike. Knowing the habits and customs of the local "guardians of order", the workers even established their own hospital, since the bitter experience of past years had shown that the city hospitals served only as a temporary station for wounded strikers on the way to jail. The central labor council sanctioned a strike in defense of the workers' right to organize.

The first serious confrontation between the strikers and the "forces of order" took place on May 22, 1934. Two men were killed. The series of negotiations that followed, with the mediation of the Governor Olson of Minnesota, produced nothing. On July 16, 1934, the strike was resumed. During one of the clashes, the police opened fire. Sixty seven persons were wounded and two were killed. One American bourgeois historian wrote: "The sense of class was tearing families and the city itself in two. When they buried one of the victims a few days later, a vast procession of workers, marching somberly across the city, stopped all traffic."<sup>1</sup> The Governor declared martial law, and units of the National Guard occupied important positions throughout the city. But the workers were undaunted. At the end of August, the Joint City Council yielded: the demands of the workers were satisfied, and their right to organize was recognized.

While the attention of laboring America was fixed on the events in Toledo and Minneapolis, a major class conflict that was to take a special place in the history of the American labor movement was in the making on the Pacific Coast. The battle was to encompass a vast territory stretching from southern California to the north of the state of Washington. The first to rise were the longshoremen of San Francisco and the surrounding industrial area.

The position of the San Francisco longshoremen on the eve of the general strike was extremely onerous. The absence of a labor union made them the object of fierce exploitation by the shipowners.

The indignation of the workers had been long in maturing; however, the chronology of events should perhaps be started

<sup>1</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt. The Coming of the New Deal*, Boston, 1958, p. 388.

from the publication in late 1932 of the first issues of the newspaper of maritime transport workers which set forth the demand that the longshoremen be allowed to exercise their right to organize their own union. The newspaper's agitation and that of the left-wing elements among the longshoremen and seamen did its job. The company union, Blue Book, fell apart, and in its place emerged the first locals of the International Association of Longshoremen (I.A.L.). The union decided to fight above all for an orderly hiring system. But to do this it had to get itself recognized by the employers' associations. The latter, however, categorically refused to have anything to do with the new locals. When the inflexibility of their position became clear, the workers decided to start a strike by the end of March 1934. They rejected the arbitration of President Roosevelt and the maneuvers of their own leaders, who were already showing an inclination toward making a compromise agreement with the employers. The leadership of the movement passed into the hands of a rank-and-file committee headed by Harry Bridges.

On May 7, 1934, the longshoremen of San Francisco went out on strike. The movement immediately spread to Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, San Pedro, San Diego Aberdeen, Astoria and all the rest of the ports on the Pacific Coast. The strike was 100 percent effective; within a few days all maritime workers had stopped work.

The strike expanded rapidly. It was supported by affiliates of the International Maritime Union, railroad workers, ships mechanics and captains of the merchant fleet. The sympathy of all laboring America was with the California strikers. A convention of the Wisconsin Federation of Labor held in Racine sent a letter of greetings to the striking longshoremen, saying that the example of worker solidarity was an inspiration to the whole working class in those trying days. Workers everywhere hailed the strike, seeing in it an example of proletarian solidarity and unity of action. In government circles, this cohesion of workers who only yesterday were disunited, caused some anxious feelings. A special memorandum from the Department of Labor to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes drew attention to just this feature of the workers' actions.



Events became increasingly tense with every passing day. A clash between strikers and police on San Francisco's Embarcadero cost the life of one worker. On May 30, the police raided an anti-fascist youth meeting, beating and maiming dozens of persons. On July 3, the San Francisco Association of Industrialists declared open war on the strikers. From that day on, tear gas, police clubs and bullets were used against the workers. On July 5, 1934, Bloody Thursday, the streets and squares in the port area turned into an arena of fierce clashes in which pickets confronted the police and vigilante gangs formed by the bourgeoisie. In some places, barricades were put up. At the end of the day, Governor Marriam ordered the National Guard to intervene on the side of the "forces of order". Soon the casualties were counted: two workers killed and 109 wounded.

Similar incidents occurred in other coastal cities. Two strikers were killed in San Pedro and two in Seattle. The response of the workers was a general strike in San Francisco. Pickets blocked all roads to the city, and shipments of food were almost halted. All business activity in the city died, taxis disappeared, and streetcars stopped operating on San Francisco's always busy Market Street. About 127,000 workers took part in the strike, with even the most conservative unions joining in.

Gen. Hugh Johnson, head of the National Recovery Administration, who came to San Francisco during the strike, later wrote: "I did not know what a general strike looked like.... I soon learned and it gave me cold shivers. We were flying a big army plane which could not land at the Presidio on the San Francisco side so we landed on the Oakland side of the Bay expecting to take an automobile to San Francisco. There just weren't any automobiles. The general strike had closed the filling stations and paralyzed the transportation of the city. I took a small plane to the Presidio where General Craig—my captain for many years in the old army—let me use his car to get to town. I had lived several years in San Francisco and what I saw shocked me physically. The food supply of the population was practically shut off, except by the individual grace and permit of a general strike committee run by an alien Communist. Even hotel dining rooms were closed and street

cars were held up. A barber at the Palace Hotel sneaked in and offered to 'bootleg' me a haircut! The economic life of the city was being strangled. There was fear that the power, light and water supply would be shut off."<sup>1</sup> In a speech at the University of California, Gen. Johnson uttered a phrase that was to become famous: "It is a threat to the community. It is a menace to government. It is a civil war."<sup>2</sup>

The reactionary forces struck out against the strike with extraordinary violence. With the help of the police, the bands of vigilantes attacked anyone who was suspected of having sympathies with the strikers. Special targets were the premises of the Communist Party and other organizations, and most of them were wrecked. Overcoming the confusion that gripped him at first, Gen. Johnson did everything possible to break the united front of the strikers and mobilize public opinion against the unions. With the help of strikebreakers, the city transit began to operate and ships began to be unloaded in the port. However, only after making substantial concessions did the employers succeed in persuading the strike committee to call off the strike. That happened on the night of July 18.

Despite the fact that the workers yielded to the pressure of the united forces of local reaction and the government, they were not defeated, and it can never be said that this strike was broken. The strike resulted in more than recognition of the West Coast longshoremen's and seamen's unions and other concessions made by the employers. In the view of the progressive longshoremen's and warehousemen's union, for many years headed by Harry Bridges, the 1934 strike was a success primarily due to the strength and solidarity of its rank-and-file participants. The almost daily meetings, the work done by rank-and-file committees, and broad contacts with other unions produced that mutual understanding and trust which united the people and inspired the will and determination that enabled them to overcome their differences, confusion and fear in the face of violence. The strikers' carefully

<sup>1</sup> Hugh S. Johnson, *The Blue Eagle from Egg to Earth*, New York, 1935, pp. 321-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

coordinated actions thwarted all the splitting maneuvers of the employers, who between 1919 and 1923 had succeeded in destroying local longshoremen's unions one by one. The solidarity with the longshoremen and seamen shown by workers in all trades and all unions was not only their response to the battle that raged on the coast; it reflected a generally held conviction that victory for the longshoremen would mark a turning point for the entire labor movement on the West Coast. And that is exactly the way it was.

The significance of the general strike in San Francisco was great. It determined the character of and set the tone for a new upsurge of the mass movement to organize millions of workers into unions, and served as an impetus to the next attack on the positions of the bourgeoisie. In this sense the San Francisco strike, to whose organization the Communists contributed greatly, was an exceptionally important action. It was no accident that a few weeks after the strike ended, an A.F.L. convention in San Francisco became the scene of a heated debate on the right of workers to organize into trade unions.

In late August 1934, a general strike of textile workers broke out. It was a short but dramatic fight. Almost half a million workers were involved as the strike spread from Georgia to Rhode Island.

The lessons of the textile strike were very instructive from the standpoint of understanding the general conditions of class struggle in the first years of the New Deal and the internal processes within the labor movement itself. The decision to call a general strike was taken at a United Textile Workers convention in mid-August 1934, under circumstances which allowed no other alternative. Against the background of a certain amount of improvement in other industries, the economic position of the textile workers remained extremely difficult. By the time the convention gathered in New York's Woodstock Hotel, many flashpoints of the struggle were already arising spontaneously across the country, and this had a decisive effect on the mood of the delegates. About 50 resolutions were introduced demanding that a general strike be called immediately, most of them coming from a group of delegates from the Southern states.

It was virtually the first time in the history of the labor movement that the South became the initiator of "industrial revolt". The convention drew up a list of worker demands, and they amounted to a revision of what the workers felt was the unfair code in the textile industry. The union's leaders, while defending the N.I.R.A. in principle, joined in criticizing the textile barons, who they felt had distorted the sense of the New Deal measures with respect to workers. The leaders did not call for a strike directly, but the very list of grievances against the employers which figured in their speeches made them supporters of such a measure, for it was inconceivable that the employers would make any concessions without a fight. On August 17, disregarding the arguments of U.T.W. President Thomas McMahon who was warning against the danger of "chaos", the convention voted for a general strike in the textile industry.

The strike was set for the beginning of September. It started with scattered actions by workers at different mills in the South. Immediately, reports began coming in about bloody clashes and the mobilization of police and private guards. The employers acted in close unity, while the U.T.W.U. categorically rejected all proposals for cooperation made by the progressive National Textile Workers Union.

In the first days of September, about half a million textile workers from Maine to Alabama stopped work; in many places, the clothing workers joined them, and there were signs that workers in other trades were prepared to do the same. The strike threatened to take on vast dimensions if it were to proceed without hindrance. Better aware of this than anyone was the strike committee, constantly in session in Washington, and the government. On September 5, Roosevelt offered to mediate, and the U.T.W.U. leaders immediately agreed. In the meantime, the struggle continued in full force. By September 7, ten workers had been killed and more than a hundred wounded in battles with police and private guards. Governor Talmage of Georgia had special concentration camps set up, where strikers were incarcerated without a trial or investigation of any kind. In Rhode Island, strikers were attacked by the National Guard in the streets of the textile workers' settlements.



Meanwhile, the U.T.W.U. leaders speeded up negotiations with government mediators in Washington with the aim of bringing the strike to an end. The first measure was to stop the mass picketing in the New England states. Thus, about a week after the struggle began, the strike front started to crack. Wherever the influence of the left-wing elements was strong, the workers continued to picket, but elsewhere the strike banners were taken down. Officials of the U.T.W.U. locals began negotiations with millowners, knowing beforehand that victory would go to the employers. Continuation of the capitulatory line followed by the central strike committee in Washington was going right down the road to defeat. At the end of the third week, a number of textile mills were back in operation. The strike leaders advised the strikers to begin negotiating for separate contracts with individual employers. On September 21, Roosevelt called on the textile workers to stop the strike and return to the mills.

On the whole, despite a number of serious setbacks, the first years of the New Deal served as a good school of struggle in which the masses learned from personal experience how to identify their friends and their overt or covert enemies. The events that took place promoted the growth of the workers' class consciousness and helped enrich the entire movement with the spirit of offensive. In the course of hard-fought strikes, the Communists and members of other left organizations proved to be able leaders, and they comprised the most active force working for the creation of labor unions. They did everything possible to unfetter the initiative of the masses as they roused the workers for the strike struggle. The position of the A.F.L. leaders, on the contrary, remained essentially what it was before, namely, to refrain from taking any action that might involve their unions in a strike.

The workers came to understand more and more deeply that they had to act together and in an organized way. Three years of excruciating privations brought about an unprecedented upsurge, beginning in 1933, of the movement to organize the unorganized. This upsurge, it should be emphasized, stemmed mainly from the initiative and militant spirit of the lower strata of workers. The movement arose from the mass protest of millions of low-paid, semiskilled industrial

workers in the basic industries who had been brought to a state of desperation by those years of bitter privation.

For most of the leaders of the A.F.L., the growth of the movement to organize the unorganized came as a complete surprise. They were unpleasantly startled by the enthusiasm and unanimity with which vast masses of workers whom they had always slighted and classified as "unorganizable" were responding to the call to join labor unions. In many instances, the arrival of a union organizer came to be an empty formality, for by then local unions had already been created and were functioning. American historian Robert Christie writes: "Nothing in the history of the A.F.L. had prepared its leaders to cope with such a vast social upheaval. The eight-hour movement of 1886 to 1890 had been a whimper, the burgeoning of unionism from 1900 to 1904 a meek cry, compared to this overwhelming clamor of social protest which dinned in the ears of A.F.L. officials while they debated."<sup>1</sup>

The tremendous urge to unionize was unquestionably an important feature of the period. Simultaneously, a number of the existing big industrial unions were strengthening their positions. The United Mine Workers made a big step forward in this respect. In some one and a half years its membership almost doubled: from 297,769 in 1933 to 528,685 in July 1934.<sup>2</sup> The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union grew from 145,800 members in 1933 to 200,000 in 1934; the leather and shoe unions, from 76,000 to 117,200, etc.<sup>3</sup> However, the membership growth of the old unions in traditionally strong union centers was not as impressive or dramatic as the rising tide of the "new trade unionism" in the industrial regions where for decades no one had dared even to talk about trade union activity. In one thundering burst, workers in steel, auto, chemical, machine-building and other industries were voting to organize industrial unions. Cities like Pittsburgh, Chicago, Gary, Detroit, Flint and Acron became centers of the "new trade unionism". The new unions—which were dubbed "N.I.R.A. unions"—were often unable to

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Christie, *Empire in Wood. A History of the Carpenters' Union*, Ithaca, 1956, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> *Labor and the New Deal*, Madison, 1957, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Wolman, *Ebb and Flow in Trade Unionism*, New York, 1936, p. 100.

withstand the employers' counterattacks and fell apart. But they did not simply disappear without a trace. There remained the experience and elements of organization, making it possible later, and with greater chance of success, to organize an attack on the open shop despite the resistance of the capitalists and the sabotage by their overt or covert accomplices in the A.F.L.

Workers in heavy industry had responded to Section 7 (a) of the N.I.R.A. with enthusiasm, assuming that it gave them a solid foundation for organizing. But they were to be bitterly disappointed when they realized how dead set the employers were against this idea and how ineffective was the government mechanism for enforcing the labor relations provisions of the law. Even when the N.I.R.A. was still a bill discussed in congressional committees, the industrial magnates had already expressed themselves unequivocally against Section 7 (a). Anything, but not the legal recognition of the workers' right to organize.

Testifying before congressional committees on behalf of the American Iron and Steel Institute, Robert Lamont had categorically protested the inclusion of the labor sections in the bill. He declared that the industry he represented would disregard the decisions of Congress.<sup>1</sup> The automobile kings joined the steel magnates. Even in the coal industry, where the employers, it would seem, had long been accustomed to dealing with trade unions, the United Mine Workers Union ran into incredible difficulties in organizing workers at mines belonging to the big steel corporations.

Reports of fierce employer resistance to the attempts of workers to exercise the rights granted them in the Norris-La Guardia Act and Section 7 (a) of the N.I.R.A. came from all directions. The executive committee of the Minnesota Federation of Labor stated in 1934 that the labor movement was encountering the same old employer tactics to prevent workers from organizing; moreover, this resistance had grown. The executive committee pointed to the feebleness of the govern-

<sup>1</sup> Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor from the Death of Gompers to the Merger*, New York, 1959, p. 110; L. L. Sorwin and A. Wubnig, *Labor Relations Boards: the Regulation of Collective Bargaining under the National Industrial Recovery Act*, Washington, D. C., 1935, p. 34.

ment agencies that were supposed to enforce the law. Strange and incomprehensible to many was the fact that many local authorities, government emissaries, and agencies like the Public Works Administration supported anti-union activity.

The workers were forced to fight for their right to organize unions without pinning hopes on the magic power of the letter of the law, for the law, it turned out, could just as successfully be used against them. Such were the conditions attending the birth of the so-called local federal unions, which usually united workers in a single factory on the basis of the industrial principle. The spirit of class solidarity broke down the barriers of craft separatism and isolation. Arising in the form of the "new" federal unions, this type of unification in no way accorded with the craft structure of the A.F.L. international unions. But it was not this alone that distinguished the new unions. The atmosphere prevailing in them had nothing in common with the stagnation and defeatism that were eroding most of the old trade unions.

In the face of the new developments, the A.F.L. leaders felt constrained to at least somehow adapt the structure of the Federation to the changed conditions. A decision was taken that federal unions which had emerged in the mass production industries could affiliate directly with the A.F.L., but no provision for their unification into national or international unions was made; that is, they would actually remain separate units. The A.F.L. convention held in January 1934 endorsed this strategy, but diplomatically remained silent about the general principles of building labor unions. Secretly hoping that the artificially separated federal unions would soon fall apart, the top leaders of the Federation declared that the rights and interests of the craft unions would be sacredly observed.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, however, the fact that workers in the basic industries were for the first time in the history of the U.S. labor movement drawn into the movement for unionization, sharply raised a number of urgent problems which the Gompersites would have liked to put off indefinitely if not take them off the agenda altogether. The recognition of the legal rights of the federal unions—whose expansion, given minimally favorable

<sup>1</sup> Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, *Organized Labor*, New York and London, 1945, p. 203.



conditions, was not hard to foresee—put into question the fundamental principles of the Gompersite policy and the organizational foundations of craft unionism in the American labor movement, and threatened to undermine the influence of the old craft unions of highly skilled workers who had long become bourgeoisified and were carefully guarding their privileges.

However, with the development of mass-production industries, the positions of the craft unions became increasingly vulnerable. New technology, the simplification of labor processes, and the use of improved mechanisms created conditions in which the employers in some industries no longer feared interruptions in production because of strikes by skilled workers. They could easily find substitutes for them by hiring new manpower. The labor processes in many cases were so simplified that even a barely literate farmer could become, say, a smelter in five to eight weeks. On top of it all, worker training was conducted in such a way as to enable every worker to easily do someone else's job. The numbers of indispensable workers were dwindling.

Consequently, the weakness or, more exactly, the importance of the craft unions in the heavy mass production industries was the natural result of the interaction of objective forces. Except in the printing trades, the craft unions were always strongest in industries untouched by the revolution—that is, by modern technological methods—for example, in construction, in the services field, on the railroads and in shipbuilding. The major industries, however, where workers were massed together at giant enterprises equipped with 20th-century machinery, remained almost untouched by the craft unions; among these were the meat-packing, rubber, cement, aluminum, machine-building, electrical, chemical, auto, radio and steel industries. These were the industries that employed primarily semiskilled and unskilled workers whose wage conditions were considerably worse than those of the privileged minority of the working class organized in the craft unions.

This, then, is what underlay the hostility felt by the labor aristocracy to any attempts to unite it with the low-paid majority under a common banner. Its leaders felt that such an amalgamation would be an unjustified concession that would

inevitably lead to the loss of all advantages won earlier, and the dissolution of the relatively small stratum of highly skilled workers in the mass of impoverished lower-class workers. Unconcealed disdain toward common class interests and toward those proletarian sections standing a step lower than the privileged top ran through all the arguments put forth by the defenders of craft unionism.<sup>1</sup>

The conflict over the question of the organizational structure of American labor unions, which had arisen in connection with the growth of industrial unions in the major industries, lay as a heavy burden on the shoulders of the labor movement, consuming its energies in internal strife to the detriment of the struggle with the common enemy—the monopolies.

During the hard years of the economic crisis, the progressive elements in the labor movement, and above all the Communists, continued day after day to conduct a painstaking, selfless struggle against discouragement and apathy over the possible results of the movement to organize unions. When in 1933 and 1934 this work bore its first fruits and brought the first successes in the basic industries, the Communist activists in the T.U.U.L. were in the very center of the events.

To the dismay of the leaders of the A.F.L., the balance of forces in the labor movement day by day changed in a direction away from craft unionism. Even the growth of the Federation itself was due primarily to four industrial unions affiliated with it—the United Mine Workers, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the Fur Workers. From 1933 through 1935, membership in these unions increased 132 percent, while the membership in the craft unions grew only 13 percent. Membership in unions of the mixed type went up 94 percent over the same period.<sup>2</sup> In 1934, industrial unions already included 33 percent of all unionized workers, as compared with 17 percent in 1929, and 27 percent in 1933.<sup>3</sup>

The federal unions in the mass-production industries demanded with growing insistence to be included in national

<sup>1</sup> Philip Taft, *Op. cit.*, pp. 63, 150.

<sup>2</sup> Thereza Wolfson and Abraham Weiss, *Industrial Unionism in the American Labour Movement*, New York City, 1937, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, *Op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98.

industrial unions, otherwise they threatened to leave the Federation. The A.F.L. leaders had to put up a serious battle on this question at a meeting of the A.F.L. executive council January 24-25, 1934. When delegates from the federal unions in the auto industry came to a convention in Detroit in June 1934 and demanded that an autonomous international auto workers' union be created, they were told to be content with the National Council of the U.A.W. union.

The workers in the radio industry also took their first step toward uniting their federal unions by creating their own National Labor Council, led by James B. Carey. And in January 1934, representatives of hundreds of federal unions in various industries gathered in Washington, where they decided to organize similar coordinating centers. By the summer of 1934, the actual formation of such centers or preparations for it were in full swing. But the status of the new national councils in the A.F.L. was clearly low and unequal. They were denied elementary rights, the A.F.L. executive council refused, for various reasons, to give them financial support, and so on.

As time went on, it became increasingly clear that the majority in the A.F.L. executive council were playing a double game; they supported the "new trade unionism" in word, while, in deed, putting up impediments to its spread. The rank-and-file members of the new unions began to realize this, and the spirit of rebellion grew increasingly strong among them. Resolutions passed at meetings and by leading bodies of the federal unions unequivocally testified to the workers' growing discontent with their status as members of unions that had only restricted rights in the A.F.L.

No sooner formed, local unions in heavy industries declared themselves in favor of fighting to a victorious end for their right to exist, for better working conditions, and for the closed shop. Many were ready to take decisive actions in defense of these demands, regardless of what sacrifice they would have to make. Hoping that the officials of the A.F.L. would respond with understanding, they asked the executive council for support. Nothing but disappointment awaited them, for the old leadership was sickened by the ways and means of resolving labor disputes which the new generation of the labor movement was proposing.

While the great mass of workers in the basic industries wanted to see the labor movement reorganized on the principles of intra-union democracy, the reactionaries in the A.F.L. insisted on keeping bureaucratic control in their hands. The workers demanded measures to combat corruption, while the officials holding positions in the top bodies of the Federation and international unions fought with all their might to preserve the status quo so that they would continue their behind-the-scenes machinations and make trade-union activity a profitable business. The bulk of working class demanded that organized labor play a more active role in politics. But this was something that the leaders of the A.F.L. would never agree to, for they looked upon any attempt to create a special political mechanism capable of defending the interests of working people as a diabolical scheme of the leftists and Communists to push the workers off the road of political "neutrality".

Interests within the American labor movement clashed along all these lines. In fact, a different understanding of the mission of trade unionism led to a polarization in the old craft unions as well. An open split of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers took place at its 1935 convention, right before the eyes of William Green, who was there as a guest. The progressive opposition accused the leadership of the Association of inertia. Within the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers, a wide network of "progressive clubs", whose members rejected the old methods of union work, took shape in 1933 and 1934.

The struggle between the advocates of organizing on industrial lines and the defenders of craft unionism became quite sharp at the 1934 A.F.L. convention in San Francisco. In the course of the debate, a compromise resolution was worked out, saying that craft unionism was more effective wherever the lines of demarcation between crafts are distinguishable, while in many industries in which thousands of workers were employed, conditions existed calling for organizing workers on the industrial basis. Accordingly, it was decided to organize the basic industries into industrial unions. But subsequent events showed that the executive council's endorsement of these resolutions was only a maneuver, and that the advocates of



industrial unionism won but a paper victory. The executive council and the old craft unions made every effort to prevent expansion of the industrial unions that were affiliated with the Federation and—most importantly—their consolidation under the aegis of single centers.

The main credit for the powerful drive to unionize the basic industries and to reorganize the entire labor movement on the basis of the principles of class struggle in defense of the economic and social rights of the American working people belonged to the rank-and-file fighters. Many prominent labor leaders (Lewis, Hillman and others), who had come out in defense of the industrial unions in the basic industries, were not saviors coming to liberate the labor movement from its lethargic sleep, apathy and indifference. And although they did make a tangible contribution by doggedly promoting the crystallization of the movement, nonetheless, it was not at the whim of these leaders, but on the whole quite independently of them, that this period saw the awakening of the working class to a vigorous struggle. It was not just happenstance that the "new" John L. Lewis appeared on the political scene no earlier than 1934, that is, once the class conflict had already reached a point of high intensity. This proves that one cannot speak of what happened as being the result of a purely inner, psychological evolution in the philosophy of Lewis or any of his colleagues. If in the 1930s they were forced to begin talking about sharp contradictions between labor and capital, the reason lay not so much in their inner motivation as in factors of quite a different nature, namely, the abrupt rise in the social self-awareness of the workers, their reacquired class consciousness, their better understanding of their disfranchised position, their hatred of the monopolies, and their determination to stand up for their interests.

The economic crisis of 1929-1933 caused a sharp deterioration in the position of the agricultural proletariat, which numbered 3.5 million to 4 million persons. In 1933, there were 621,000 fully unemployed agricultural workers in the United States,<sup>1</sup> and farm employers took advantage of this to cut wages. According to official data, wages of farm employees

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book III*, New York, 1936, p. 49.

were halved over the four years, and in 1933 amounted to only 84 percent of the prewar level. "...The average annual wage of hired farm workers was only 33% of the average wage of factory workers in 1929; 25% in 1932...."<sup>1</sup> The agricultural wage fluctuations can be seen from the following figures (in dollars):<sup>2</sup>

Table 5

Year	Monthly	Daily	Year	Monthly	Daily
1910-1914 (average) prewar)	29.09	1.43	1932	26.67	1.21
1929	49.08	2.42	1933	24.51	1.18
1930	44.59	2.16	1934	27.17	1.31
1931	35.03	1.65	1935	29.48	1.43

As can be seen from Table 5, the position of the agricultural workers remained extremely difficult after the economic crisis of 1929-1933. Even when the market situation improved, the big employers kept wages at the former level. And while after the N.I.R.A. was passed the industrial workers could to some extent rely on the established legal standards for hours and wages, the agricultural proletariat had no such opportunity, for the law which had granted the working class certain concessions did not extend to agricultural workers.

Nor did the Roosevelt administration's agrarian program, which was aimed at limiting agricultural production, in any way benefit the agricultural workers. When the big farmers reduced the areas under cultivation they generally also hired fewer workers. As a result, tens of thousands of farm laborers were deprived of a means of existence, causing a new rise in unemployment in the agricultural regions of the country. The number of fully unemployed agricultural workers in the

<sup>1</sup> Anna Rochester, *Why Farmers Are Poor. The Agricultural Crisis in the United States*, New York, 1940, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Table compiled from data of the Department of Agriculture—*Crops and Markets*, February 1932, p. 60, February 1933, p. 48, February 1934, p. 49; *Agricultural Statistics*, 1938, p. 450.

United States in 1935 reached 734,000.<sup>1</sup> Wages in agriculture in the mid-1930s amounted to only 60 percent of the average wage in 1929. Furthermore, Blacks generally received half the wage paid to white agricultural workers, which meant that the Black worker's income almost never exceeded \$100 a year.

The plight of the sharecroppers was even worse. According to one survey, the average net incomes for sharecroppers in the early 1930s were only \$312 a year per family and \$71 a year per person.<sup>2</sup> With incomes like this, hundreds of thousands of sharecroppers in the South were unable to satisfy even the most elementary needs in food, clothing and shelter.

Finally, there was another large group of agricultural workers who were in a particularly calamitous position. These were the migrant workers who moved from place to place throughout the country in search of seasonal work. A considerable proportion of this army of migrant workers was composed of Mexicans and Filipinos. But hundreds of thousands of ruined small farmers who were native-born Americans also poured into their ranks. The itinerant workers had no work at all for a large part of the year.<sup>3</sup>

The migrant workers' living conditions were terrible. Their temporary camps consisted of pitiful shacks made of boxes and scrap iron, with several families living together in each shack. Their children suffered from constant malnutrition, were deprived of medical care, and very often had no chance to go to school. In a word, the migrants found themselves at the very bottom of the social ladder.

It was not surprising that the intolerable economic position the agricultural workers were in moved them to wage an active strike struggle. The T.U.U.L. led a number of big strikes of agricultural workers and helped them organize their own unions, thereby creating conditions that were more favorable for the development of the strike movement in agriculture. Year after year, agricultural workers' strikes grew in frequen-

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book III*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Rochester, *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> *The Migratory-Casual Worker. Works Progress Administration, Research Monograph VII*, Washington, 1937, pp. 55-62.

cy, spread to new areas, and became better organized. All in all, no less than 120,000 agricultural workers were involved in strikes during the period 1930-1935.

The main arena of the agricultural strike movement in the first half of the 1930s was California, by then already a region of highly developed capitalist farming. It was in California that large enterprises, which during the harvest season hired hundreds and sometimes even thousands of workers, became most widespread.

The first spontaneous action of agricultural workers during the economic crisis occurred in January 1930 at the fruit and vegetable farms in the Imperial Valley at the southern end of California. About 8,000 people took part in the strike struggle in which they demanded a 25-percent wage increase, improved living conditions and no sacking of those who took part in the strike.

The employers' response was to unleash hired gangs of vigilantes. The workers could not hold out against the united front of the employers and local authorities. But despite their defeat, the Imperial Valley strike played an important role, for it marked the beginning of unionization among the American agricultural proletariat. The Communists from the T.U.U.L. contributed a great deal to the effort. Under their leadership, the striking workers created their own union, the Agricultural Laborers' Production League, later renamed the Cannery Workers Union.

The greatest upsurge of the agricultural strike movement in California came in 1933, when there were 36 strikes involving a total of about 50,000 farm workers. The Communist-led Cannery Workers Union, which by the summer of 1933 had over 8,000 members, played an important role in the struggle. During 1933, this union headed more than 20 strikes involving a total of over 40,000 agricultural workers in different parts of California.

The biggest was the strike of 18,000 cotton pickers which began in October 1933 in the Bakersfield area, rapidly spread to the vast Central California region and encompassed a number of counties in the San Joaquin Valley. The basic demands of the strikers were: a wage increase for cotton pickers to one dollar for 100 pounds (instead of the 60 cents



they were receiving), improved living conditions, and the employers' recognition of the union.

The rich farmers and the companies engaged in buying and processing cotton mobilized all forces to suppress the strike. During the 20 days of the strike, three strikers were killed, 42 wounded, and more than 100 arrested.

The strikers put up stiff resistance to every attempt at suppressing their strike, and despite the harsh privations, they fought on. Every day the struggle grew fiercer. Small farmers came to the aid of the strikers. In Pixley, McFarland and some other localities, small farmers marched the picket lines and fought off police attacks together with the workers.

In the final count, the workers forced the employers to make concessions. During a meeting with representatives of the big agricultural companies, Governor Rolf of California declared that the wages of cotton pickers should be raised somewhat in order to stop the spread of radicalism and Communism. On October 25, 1933, the employers officially notified the agricultural workers' union that they would agree to pay a wage of 75 cents per 100 pounds of picked cotton. Winning a partial victory, the cotton pickers heeded their union's recommendation to call off the strike.

The actions taken by the agricultural workers in California helped to improve their position. According to Department of Labor data, their hourly wages went from an average of 15 to 17 cents in 1932 to 25 cents in 1933. As a result, agricultural wages in California became the highest in the United States. In this connection, the role of the Agricultural Laborers' Production League grew. By the beginning of 1934, it already had a membership of 20,000, and its influence extended to many tens of thousands of unorganized workers.

The big farm owners demanded that state and local authorities take measures against the Communists and the union they led. Moreover, they set the wheels in motion to create a special organization to fight against strikes. The necessary funds were provided by banks, railroad and electric companies and cannery owners. It was on this basis that a new anti-labor organization of California farmers was formed in May 1934; its objective: to suppress the strike movement of agricultural workers and destroy their union. It was headed by

a big agricultural businessman who owned several thousands of acres of fertile land in the San Joaquin Valley. By mid-1934, the organization had branches throughout the state.

In the summer of 1934, its forces gathered and extensive preparations made, the agricultural bourgeoisie went into action. On July 20, the police and vigilantes seized and wrecked all the premises of the agricultural workers' union in Sacramento and other cities. The union's property was confiscated, the literature it put out was destroyed, and eighteen active union workers were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms.<sup>1</sup>

The blow to the union proved to be fatal. The union's locals were caught unawares, and the union was smashed, which substantially weakened the strike movement of the agricultural proletariat in California.

In the first half of the 1930s, several agricultural strikes took place in other Western states. True, the strike action there was considerably weaker than in California, but even so, the spread of the movement to new areas represented a step forward.

An important area of the struggle were the sugar beet plantations in Colorado. The first spontaneous actions of workers occurred in 1931. It was then that several chapters of the Agricultural Laborers' Production League were formed in that state. Under the League's leadership, a strike of 18,000 beet workers was staged in May and June 1932. The strike considerably extended the influence of the new union.

Besides Colorado, there were strikes of agricultural workers in the mid-1930s on cotton plantations in Arizona, fruit farms in Washington, and in a number of other regions of the West.

The strike movement of the agricultural proletariat also spread to some Northern states (Ohio, Michigan, Massachusetts, New Jersey). The most famous were the strikes on the large plantations of the Seabrook Stock Company located near Bridgeton, N. J. On its vast territory of 5,000 acres, the company employed a large number of workers, partly

<sup>1</sup> *Nation*, October 31, 1934, p. 493, April 24, 1935, p. 48; *New Republic*, November 14, 1934, p. 20, February 20, 1935, p. 37.

residents of neighboring towns and partly Black migrant workers hired in the South. The living and working conditions were atrocious, and this is what spurred the workers to struggle.

During the years of the economic crisis, agricultural workers in the Southern states also joined the struggle. This happened first on the plantations of Alabama. In the spring of 1931, the Communist Party helped organize a sharecroppers' union in Tallapoosa and Lee counties. The union led a struggle to stop the practice of driving sharecroppers from the land, to get their debts cancelled, and to give them the right to sell their harvests themselves.

The cotton plantations of Arkansas were another region of the strike movement. The struggle there was led by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which was formed in July 1934 with the help of left Socialists.

Thus, in many regions of the country, the agricultural proletariat waged a struggle to improve living and working conditions. However, the strike movement still had many weak sides. It had no centralized leadership, and the ones taking part in strikes were almost exclusively migrant workers. This affected unfavorably the development of the strike struggle in the agricultural regions. Moreover, the agricultural proletariat had almost no ties at all with the urban workers and the masses of small farmers.

## CHAPTER XII

### UNITY OF ACTION MOVEMENT

The political situation in 1934 and 1935 was such that unity of action by all anti-monopoly forces was becoming the key question. The reactionary forces, recovering from the shock of 1933, raised their voices against the liberal trends of the New Deal. Pro-fascist elements became active. Roosevelt faced a dilemma: whether to yield to the pressure of big business and be influenced by elements on the extreme right, or to stick to a constructive approach to problems heeding the aspirations of the masses for more effective measures in the fight with depression and poverty.

Aware of the danger posed by the shift to the right in the policies of the ruling class, the Communist Party advanced a slogan calling for labor unity on the basis of a platform that could serve as the center of gravity for all forces fighting for social progress and against monopoly reaction. This slogan envisaged the creation of a broad coalition capable of defending democratic development and ensuring further progress in social reforms. The need for such a coalition was felt more sharply as the days went by. At the same time, real prerequisites appeared for a closer unity of democratic forces.



Many A.F.L. unions were themselves taking the initiative for unity of action with left trends.

But unity of action was not an end in itself. It was needed above all to bring about a new and substantial increase in the political weight of the labor movement. Important steps in this direction had already been made. The election campaigns of 1932 and 1934 showed that the working class was playing an increasingly noticeable role in the political life of the country. It gave substantial support not only to liberally-minded public figures, but also to its own candidates who were prepared to fight for a course toward social renovation.

Against the background of the broad activity of the masses, a movement for the formation of a farmer-labor party was revived. It was rooted in the traditions of the popular anti-monopoly movement which ever since the turn of the century had frequently tried to break with the two-party system and establish itself as a third party. However, all those attempts had failed. The protest of the laboring masses, with the exception of individual episodes that were never developed, was kept within the framework of the two-party system. The decisive factor in that situation was either the complete absence or the inadequate development of independent political action by the *working class*. Touching on this subject, Engels wrote to Sorge in 1893: "Nor can it be denied that American conditions contain very great and unique difficulties for the *steady* development of a labor party."<sup>1</sup> Among these difficulties he noted the highly mixed national composition of the population, the peculiarities in the formation and economic position of the working class, historical traditions, and the specific features of the U.S. constitutional system, which was adapted to the absolute dominance in politics of the big bourgeois twin-parties.

In the forty years since Engels made that observation, important changes had occurred in the economy, the structure of the population, and the make-up of the working class in America. By the 1930s, language barriers and national-cultural isolation had diminished; the working class had become considerably more homogeneous, although ethnic, racial and

<sup>1</sup> Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, 1968, Bd. 39, S. 173.

regional differences were still a factor whose negative effect was constantly felt. National prejudices cultivated by capitalist conditions, and religious and cultural differences impeded that process of political regrouping which might have made it possible for a progressive third party, a party of the working people, to take root in American political life.

The peculiarities in American political development connected with the specific features of the constitutional system, to which Engels referred in the letter quoted above, were still in full evidence in the 1930s. The point is that the existing majority electoral system ruled out the possibility for any party to gain representation in the highest bodies of power if it lagged behind even by a minimal number of votes in the elections. Many who opposed the two-party system were therefore forced to vote for candidates of one of the two bourgeois parties simply because they knew that the supporters of a third party would be unable to break up the bloc of the two old parties which enjoyed unlimited financial backing from the powers-that-be. The ruling class has always seen to it that the foundations of this system remain unshakeable.

It should also be borne in mind that over the four preceding decades, the Gompersite policy of trade-union "neutrality" had sunk deep roots in the labor movement. Nor can it be discounted that during that period, which was full of revolutionary upheavals of world significance, the much-experienced American bourgeoisie also learned lessons in social maneuvering, owing to which, from the beginning of the 20th century, the historical tendency toward forming a third party in the United States was frequently, to use Lenin's words, "a specimen of the broad bourgeois-reformist trend".<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party in 1912, for example, was of this character.

In critical situations, the bourgeoisie made use of its ability for political imitation. The liberal current could even call itself a labor party. Indeed, small political groupings that were thoroughly bourgeois in their social composition and political credos sometimes presented themselves as farmer-labor parties. They considered it expedient, in order to win popularity

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 204.

and additional votes, to hang out the Farmer-Labor Party shingle and act with an eye to regional and economic interests, and ethnic or even religious sentiments. Because of their heterogeneity, they rather impeded than facilitated the creation of a national labor party.

In 1932, the Democratic Party decided to take the controls of this trend and to steer it in the direction it needed. Using slogans of Progressivism and promising the country drastic changes, the Democratic Party—following the tactical line of its leader—sought to absorb all those elements in American society that were or could potentially become supporters of a struggle for social progress under the banner of a political party of the working masses—a third party. It was no accident that, for a while, Franklin D. Roosevelt looked favorably upon the activities of Upton Sinclair as the leader of the Democratic Party of California.

Such were some of the more formidable obstacles which in the 1930s complicated the process of rooting a third party in American soil, a party of the working classes in which workers and their unions could play an important role.

Nonetheless, increasingly making itself felt at that time as an inevitable result of the conditions that had taken shape was a trend toward unity of action on a higher level, toward creating a real farmer-labor party that would be supported by the masses and have a program aimed against the monopolies and in defense of the economic interests of the working people. Some of the A.F.L. unions had already come out in 1931 for the formation of an independent labor party. In 1933, at an A.F.L. convention in Washington, a delegate from the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers introduced a resolution urging that the A.F.L. abandon its traditional non-partisan policy and take the initiative in creating a genuine labor party. Defending the effectiveness of its policy, the A.F.L. leaders, which had the majority of the delegates behind it, had little trouble in getting the resolution voted down.

In the union locals, the city labor councils and some State Federations of Labor, however, the ferment did not subside. Farmer-Labor parties appeared in the cities of Philadelphia and Kenosha, and in the states of Oregon, New Jersey,

Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party became stronger. In some local Farmer-Labor parties, a left wing became more active. At a convention of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party in 1935, for example, among the delegates there were 40 Communist Party members representing trade unions and worker cooperatives.

The movement to organize an independent labor or farmer-labor party became even more noticeable in 1934 and especially in 1935. A resolution introduced at an A.F.L. convention in Atlantic City (1935) by representatives of a number of federal unions who had proposed holding a nation-wide referendum on the question of creating a labor party, said that among union members and workers in general, there were strong sentiments in favor of creating an independent political party. At that same convention, a delegate from the Stenographers' Union of Hartford, Conn., speaking in favor of a resolution to establish a labor party, said that a Connecticut Federation of Labor convention had come out in support of the movement to create a labor party and had decided to hold a referendum on this question. Labor union conferences were held in Michigan, New Jersey, Illinois and other states for the same purpose.

Many big A.F.L. unions, especially those that had great numbers of unskilled and semiskilled workers in their membership, were now openly in favor of forming a labor party on the basis of the union movement, while in other unions the idea was promoted by an emerging strong left wing. At a United Mine Workers convention in late 1935, for example, 27 resolutions were introduced favoring the formation of a farmer-labor party and 44 calling for endorsement of Roosevelt's Democratic Party.<sup>1</sup> A Wisconsin Federation of Labor convention vigorously voiced its advocacy of forming an independent farmer-labor political league. The report of that federation's executive council on the third party question said that the organized labor movement had learned long ago that it was fruitless to support the old parties. Debates at the

<sup>1</sup> *Communist*, March, 1936, p. 217.



Wisconsin Federation of Labor's conventions, the report added, infallibly testified to a lack of faith in the two main parties among workers.

At the 10th convention of the influential clothing workers' union, the leadership succeeded in killing a resolution in favor of creating a farmer-labor party only by dint of great effort. The delegates agreed with the opinion of the leaders after Hillman assured them that he was in complete solidarity with those who defended the principle of labor's independent political action and would not miss the chance to throw the whole weight of the union's influence onto the scales whenever the possibility of forming a farmer-labor party became real.

The 1935 A.F.L. convention in the Atlantic City became the scene of a heated debate over the issue of a labor party. Delegates from unions with a total membership of about 500,000 introduced a dozen or more resolutions calling for the formation of a labor or farmer-labor party. What was the crux of these proposals? What motivated the people who drew them up? How did they envisage the organizational principles of a future political party of the working people? To answer these questions, let us turn to the most detailed resolution, one introduced by a representative of the United Textile Workers Union.

Its introduction stated that an unabating movement toward breaking with the Democratic and Republican parties and forming a labor party was evident among workers throughout the United States. Further, it said that it was becoming increasingly clear to working people that both bourgeois parties truckled to the same small group of private capital represented by the bankers and giant corporations. The resolution pointed to the danger that growing popular discontent might force the monopolies to resort to an outright anti-labor, anti-Roosevelt policy, to use the discontent of the people in their own interests and throw them into the abyss of fascism. American workers were becoming increasingly aware, the document noted, that they would counter an anti-labor policy and fascism only by creating their own political party based on the labor movement.

In the course of the debate on the resolution, the representative of the United Textile Workers Union again drew the

delegates' attention to the fact that the need to create a labor party was dictated, among other things, by the threat of world war and fascism, which would bring disaster to workers and could wreck their entire movement.

The resolution introduced by the delegate from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union was very significant. It said that the workers should defy big business and organize politically. They would set up their own party with its own program and its own candidates in elections, financed and controlled by the workers themselves. The workers should draft their own program to balance out production and distribution. It was only a labor party, that they must establish, that would press for realization of such a program, for neither of the old parties, the resolution pointed out, would ever do anything for it.

Labor's growing sentiment in favor of independent political action induced even some of the ideological and political leaders of "pure" trade unionism to express a sort of conciliatory attitude toward this trend, although in very general and uncommitting terms. In his keynote address at the 1935 A.F.L. convention, William Green expressed the opinion that the A.F.L. would champion independent political action in the form of creating an independent political party whenever the clearly defined opinion of the workers showed they were convinced that their interests could be better served through political action than by pursuing a non-partisan policy. Green obviously had no intention of repudiating the notorious theory of A.F.L. "neutrality". He was far from it. The A.F.L. president personally sided with those who rejected the idea of forming a labor party on the pretext of its being alien. But formally, he agreed to put off making a final decision until the majority of the membership defined its position.

The substance of most of the resolutions on forming a labor party bore only a slight imprint of socialist ideas. The organizational foundations of the new party were conceived, as we have already seen, according to the British Labour Party pattern. It was contemplated that the party would include as collective members trade unions and associations of unemployed, office workers, farmers, sharecroppers, etc. The

ideological platform of the future party remained virtually undefined. As for the local farmer-labor parties which had arisen in many states and often quickly fell apart, their programs frequently represented a fairly clear list of demands for liberal reforms. In a number of cases they contained slogans calling for the nationalization of public utilities, including the railroads and telephone and telegraph companies.

The third-party movement was thus mixed in nature. As a rule, the establishment of farmer-labor parties was not followed up by any broad or steady educational or organizational campaign to enhance their cohesion. A negative role in this was often played by the fact that the leaders and supporters of labor parties usually saw in the organization they created not a mechanism for prolonged political struggle, but simply an electioneering vehicle.

The struggle for the formation of a national farmer-labor party went on within the context of the broader movement for the further democratization of the country and against fascism and war. The labor movement, the liberation movement of the Negro people, the struggle of the farmers, and the anti-war and anti-fascist movement all merged into a single stream to oppose internal reaction and defend the New Deal from its attacks, compelling the Roosevelt administration to steer a course toward intensifying its liberal reform program, which was originally vague, very moderate and, moreover, designed for only a short-term existence.

Due to the intensive political activity of the most diverse sections of the public, there began to take shape in 1932 and 1933 that "broad, organizationally loose coalition of workers, farmers, Negroes, youth, professional people, small businessmen and other democratic groups, as well as that section of the capitalists" who supported the New Deal. In its class composition, as Foster noted, this coalition "resembled the Bryan and La Follette movements of previous decades. It was not, however, properly speaking, a people's front. The workers were not its leaders, and it made no direct attack upon the entrenched position of monopoly capital. Nevertheless, the movement did bear a distinct and direct relationship to the

current, anti-fascist people's fronts of Europe and Latin America."<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1934, an anti-Roosevelt bloc had already been formed and began accusing the New Deal administration of endeavoring to "communize" America, abolish private enterprise, etc. The reactionary circles of the big bourgeoisie, having recovered from the crisis and presuming that further concessions to the democratic forces would put the very foundations of capitalism in jeopardy, accused Roosevelt of undermining confidence in business with his "pro-labor" policy, and of undermining the federal budget by allocating large sums of money for unemployment relief. The alternative this conservative opposition proposed was to cut wages, increase hours, stop relief, put an end to the activities of left organizations, ban strikes, deport "rabble rousers" like Harry Bridges, and so forth.

But the American working class not only continued to press for its economic demands, but came out vigorously in defense of civil liberties. As a result, the labor movement's influence on political life and government policy grew immeasurably.

Nor did the working class remain aloof from events abroad. It played a most prominent part in the broad anti-war movement that had developed in the United States and in other countries. Anti-fascist and anti-war demonstrations, many of which were sponsored by the Communist Party and organizations associated with it, were held in many U.S. cities between 1929 and 1933.

The year 1934 saw a further growth of the anti-fascist movement in the United States. In March, for example, a mass meeting in New York adopted a resolution entitled "Civilization's Verdict Against Hitlerism". It said, in part: "We declare that the Hitler government is compelling the German people to turn back from civilization to an antiquated and barbarous despotism which menaces the progress of mankind toward peace and freedom and is a present threat against civilized life throughout the world."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *Outline Political History of the Americas*, p. 427.

<sup>2</sup> *Advance*, New York, March 1934, p. 3.



The progressive sections of the American working class were becoming fully aware of the need for active struggle against the fascist threat and preparations for a new world war.

An important organization in the fight against the growing menace to democracy and peace was the American League Against War and Fascism, established in 1933. It carried on an increasingly broad and diversified struggle, although its inadequate connection with the bulk of the working class was detrimental to the common effort. Nonetheless, the League's second and subsequent annual congresses showed that it was becoming a real and highly influential force in U.S. political life.

The fact that the bulk of the American working class held anti-fascist sentiments and condemned aggression did not mean that the working class as a whole had already discarded all isolationist sentiments. To be sure the spontaneous isolationism of the popular masses, who sincerely sympathized with the victims of aggression and fascism, had nothing in common with those principles of foreign-policy isolationism which the American monopolists used to cover up their schemes for economic and political expansion and to assure for themselves the most profitable positions in the diplomatic game being played out in the international arena.

The Communist Party's growing influence on various spheres of social life in those years and the significance of its contribution to the struggle for social progress were directly related to its work in analyzing the main and typical trends of socio-economic development. On the basis of this analysis, the Communist Party had foreseen the approach of a tremendous economic crisis and warned about it. It had pointed out the necessity of mobilizing the popular masses for an all-out struggle to defend their social and economic interests, and urged the people to shed their inertia and placidity and sweep away the blinding illusions of "eternal prosperity".

Unlike the various reformist organizations and groups who were captives of bourgeois propaganda, the Communist Party gave a clear-cut evaluation of the basic economic and social processes which were predetermined by the impending crisis. A resolution of a plenary meeting of the Central Committee in

October 1929 said that the economic crisis would immediately aggravate the contradictions inherent in American capitalism and, on the international scale, would lead to the exacerbation of the general crisis of capitalism and increase the threat of war. It further said that any attempt to overcome the crisis by shifting the burden onto the working class (by reducing wages, increasing unemployment, lowering the standard of living) would accelerate the radicalization of the working class and usher in a period of great class battles.<sup>1</sup>

In the very first months of the crisis, the Communists were in the front line of the battle against poverty and for the rights of the working people. All their energies and educational activity were subordinated to one goal—to help the working people, to arouse the fighting spirit in them, to inspire hope of getting out of the impasse not by waiting for alms from above, but through their own efforts. This immediately transformed the Communist Party into one of the most dynamic and influential forces in the American labor and democratic movements. The realities of the day, primarily the tremendous growth of unemployment, prompted the right choice of direction for the Party's work—this was above all to mobilize the masses for the struggle for social insurance and unemployment relief. The chosen line, which met the most vital interests of the working class, was then reflected in all of the Party's major documents, including the decisions of the seventh Party convention in 1930. We have already seen how great a role the Communist Party played in organizing the unemployed movement. Through the activity of the unemployed councils it inscribed one of the brightest pages in the history of the American labor movement. The Party exposed the anti-popular essence of the A.F.L.'s capitulatory policy. In the difficult conditions of the first two years of the crisis, in an atmosphere of confusion and fear, the Communists were the first to raise the banner of struggle for better living and working conditions. They led strikes of miners in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and of textile workers in Lawrence and Patterson, and organized the first militant actions in the theretofore impregnable domain of the monopolies—heavy industry.

<sup>1</sup> See, *Daily Worker*, October 23, 1929.

The transition from crisis to depression, the victory of the Democrats, and the inauguration of Roosevelt's reform program introduced many new elements to the situation. Changes within the labor movement itself demanded special attention from the Communist Party leaders in order that they might correctly map out their tactical line. An analysis of the socio-economic changes in the country was made at an Extraordinary Conference which the Party called in early July 1933. Unfortunately, the decisions of the conference revealed elements of over-simplification in the approach to the complex political developments in the United States, and this also made itself felt in the Party's practical work.

The Party leadership proceeded from the assumption that the measures undertaken by the Roosevelt administration would worsen the already intolerable position of the working masses, and that they represented an acute form of the bourgeoisie's development toward reaction and fascism. The New Deal, in this analysis, was erroneously characterized as a shift to the right from Hoover's policies. This assessment was fraught with the danger of causing the Communist Party's isolation from the rapidly revived anti-monopoly movement and a break with many mass progressive social organizations which saw in the New Deal the beginning of a movement in the direction that created better opportunities for an important regrouping of the political forces within the country and a counter-attack against the positions of monopoly capital.

The decisions of the Extraordinary Conference ignored not only the fact that the New Deal meant a certain improvement in the economic position of the working people, but also the fact that, reflecting popular pressure, it introduced a breath of fresh air into the stagnant atmosphere of reaction, political arrogance and stupidity that prevailed in the country for a whole decade. This was also in the interests of the working class and all progressive forces.

Serious danger also lay in the incorrect evaluation of the New Deal's economic trends and measures, which, according to that evaluation, proved that all of the bourgeoisie's attempts to cope with the situation and to find at least temporary means of improvement were utterly hopeless. Regarding the New Deal as a failure in the economic sphere led to a

distortion of the historical perspective and gave rise to an incorrect conception of the character of the class contradictions and the rate at which they were deepening. In 1933 and 1934, the Communist Party proceeded from the thesis that a broad movement of workers, farmers and middle strata had arisen and was already directed against the two-party system and the bourgeois state. A certain overestimation of the rate and extent of the radicalization of the masses led to the Party's overlooking the opportunities that could result from the creation of united democratic front of working people in forms that were traditional for mass popular movements in the United States.

At the same time, the Party conference correctly guided the Communists with respect to their practical participation in the new upsurge of the labor movement. It stressed the need to strengthen the work of Party units and to improve the Party's educational activity. The circulation of communist publications increased, contacts were made with a number of big trade unions, and the job of concentrating forces in heavy industry made headway. It must be said that in the major industrial regions, the Communists had to work under especially difficult conditions; moreover, the Party units there remained very weak both in experience and in ideological background. Taking this into account, the Party leadership undertook a series of measures with an eye to improving the composition of the membership, above all by drawing in workers from the basic industries.

The Communist Party made important progress in its work among the Negroes and youth, and in organizing the anti-war movement. It was in the 1930s that the Communists, disregarding the many dangers, established the first units and links of the broad Negro civil rights movement that was to develop in full force after World War II. At that time, the N.A.A.C.P. was weak and inert, confining its work to the advocacy of equal opportunity, while the Socialist Party simply ignored the needs of the Negro population. In the meantime, the Communist Party worked under extremely difficult conditions in the Southern states.

Joining the party at that time were many active fighters from among the Negro people who in time came to hold important



positions in the leadership (Henry Winston, Benjamin Davis, William Patterson and others). It is interesting to note that the main influx of Negroes came through the unemployed movement, which was in a certain sense the precursor of the present civil rights movement. No other political group did as much for mobilizing the labor movement and public opinion in defense of Negro civil rights as did the Communists at that time. At their initiative, laboring America raised its voice to save a group of Negro youths who were unjustly sentenced to death by a court in Scottsboro, Alabama. A wave of demonstrations of white and Black workers swept across the country, demanding the release of the innocent boys. According to Foster, no less than one million people took part in this mass struggle. The fight went on for many years. Finally the scandalous frame-up came to an end, and all of the innocent Scottsboro prisoners were released.

Unlike the Socialists, the Communist Party regarded the question of Negro rights as one of the central points in its program. It fought against lynch law and jim crowism, worked for solidarity between white and Black workers, agitated to save the victims of anti-Black terror, and raised the entire liberation movement of the American Blacks to a new level by bringing it national recognition. Even a writer so far from having any sympathy toward the Communist Party as Wilson Record had to acknowledge the role of the Communists in the liberation movement of the Black population in the 1930s. In his book, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, he wrote: "...Communists did exert something more than an inconsequential influence on the Negro question during this period. It [the party] widely publicized the varied injustices suffered by American Blacks—in the courts, the schools, the trade unions, the government services, and in all areas of life in the South; there can be no doubt about this ... it exposed the hypocrisy of a nation that *spoke* with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and *acted* with the restrictive covenant, the segregated street car, the poll tax, the lynch rope and the faggot.... The Communist Party was also instrumental in heaping further discredit on the compromising philosophy.... The Communists were a source of ferment among many of the younger Negroes.... Among the tenant farmers and the sharecroppers

of the South the Communists set the example of organization... It [the party] provided some organizational outlets for the unemployed Negroes who frequently lacked any means of expression except through the Party controlled councils. Further, the Communists without doubt provided a stimulus for the alteration of some of the encrusted habits of the moderate organizations.... The Communists must also be credited with a special effort to develop a political consciousness among Negro women."<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party revived the traditions of a broad anti-war movement of the masses, unifying the uncoordinated efforts of many social groups into a single stream under the banner of the American League Against War and Fascism, which was established in 1933 with the most active participation of Communists. The party succeeded in drawing great numbers of youth into the anti-war and anti-fascist movement. William Foster, Eugene Dennis, Gus Hall, George Jackson and other Communist figures played an active role in organizing the youth movement in the 1930s. In the spring of 1934, 24,000 students took part in a student anti-war strike (against U.S. participation in the imperialist war then in preparation); in 1935, 150,000 took part in a similar action, and in 1936, the number grew to one million. This was an unquestionable success.

Life itself introduced substantial correctives into the tactical line of the Communist Party, compelling it to discard erroneous decisions and work out new ones that were more flexible and in accord with the real state of affairs and balance of class forces. A plenary meeting of the Party's Central Committee in January 1934, noting the fact that class contradictions had been further aggravated, forecasted an upsurge of the strike movement in the basic industries. The Central Committee again drew the attention of Party functionaries to the need for stepping up the work among the unemployed and campaigning for a social insurance system. The task was to unionize public works employees.

The growing threat of a new offensive by internal reaction

<sup>1</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, Chapel Hill, 1951, pp. 114-15.

made it imperative to unify all progressive forces, particularly that part of them which represented the working class. Time and again the Communist Party tried to contact the Socialists in order to involve them in the formation of a united front for the fight against poverty and hunger. On March 30, 1933, the secretariat of the C.P. Central Committee published a statement with a concrete proposal to Socialists, supporters of the C.P.L.A., and A.F.L. members to come to an agreement for the sake of unity of action. The Communists proposed uniting the efforts of all labor organizations around common demands acceptable both to the Communist Party and the A.F.L.

However, there remained many obvious and hidden obstacles to establishing contacts and cooperation. For a long time, the Socialists rejected all Communist proposals for a united front. The right wing of the S.P. leadership, which had many supporters among New York Socialists, absolutely refused to enter into a dialogue with the Communists. The centrist group headed by Norman Thomas took an evasive and inconsistent position, seeking to reconcile the rightists with the left wingers who more and more strongly favored alliance with the Communists.

The obstacles notwithstanding, the idea of unity of action gradually made headway. It proved to be considerably easier to find a common language at the lower and middle levels. In many cases, primary organizations of Communists and Socialists joined forces to organize individual working-class actions in defense of specific demands. Cooperation between the two parties increased in the unemployed movement and in the anti-war youth movement. Despite the hostile attitude toward the "overly close" contacts between rank-and-file Socialists and Communists at the auto plants, these contacts grew stronger and produced significant results in the struggle for an auto workers' union.

Elements of a new approach to the analysis of the socio-economic and political situation in the country could clearly be seen in the decisions of the eighth convention of the Communist Party, held in April 1934, in Cleveland. By that time Party membership had reached 24,000. The convention established the fact that there was an improvement in the economic situation, but pointed out that the measures

undertaken by Roosevelt could not cancel out the internal contradictions of capitalism and would not save it from future upheavals. The government's paternalistic measures would inevitably lead to greater control over the activities of trade unions; they were aimed at undermining the militant spirit of the working class and ultimately at depriving it of independence as a social force. Such was the conclusion the Communist Party had come to. Consequently, the task was to safeguard and deepen the gains already made and thereby to frustrate any attempts to demoralize the labor movement, tame it and make it an obedient instrument of the bourgeoisie. The resolutions of the convention brought out the fact that American imperialism had joined in the preparations for a new war, regarding it as the best way to solve internal contradictions, that the struggle between the United States and Japan for hegemony in the Pacific Ocean was becoming ever more obvious with every passing day, and that both countries were increasing their naval potential in anticipation of war.

The convention described the basic trends in the development of the mass struggle in the United States, noting that the center of the struggle had shifted to the basic industries and that there was rapid growth in the scope and intensity of class conflicts. The struggle of the Negro people against national oppression had become an important problem in the political life of the country, the convention stressed, and the significance of the Negro liberation struggle as a factor deepening the crisis of American capitalism had grown enormously. The Communist Party proceeded from the premise that current developments would inevitably lead to major class battles.

The convention decided that the chief tasks standing before the Communists under the new circumstances involved organizing the resistance of the masses to the growing threat of fascism and imperialist war, against manifestations of white chauvinism, in defense of national equality and solidarity of Negroes and whites, and against the attempts of the capitalists to nullify the concessions made to workers.

The main results of the eighth Party convention were the conclusions regarding the activity of the Party in the labor movement. The existence of strong opposition within the ranks of the labor movement to the policy of the A.F.L.



leadership was the basis for concluding that it was possible to unite all forces opposing the official A.F.L. line into a single organization capable of effectively fighting for the interests of the broad working-class masses. The general course of subsequent events confirmed the conclusions of the convention.

In 1933, the C.P.U.S.A. and the T.U.U.L. began to devote greater attention to work within the reformist trade unions. The upsurge of the mass movement for militant industrial unions brought into sharper focus the errors in the work of the T.U.U.L., errors that were seriously hampering the development of the League's ties with the broad masses. This manifested itself, in William Foster's words, in the tendency to identify the League with the Communist Party,<sup>1</sup> which created additional difficulties in establishing contacts with conservatively-minded workers and impeded carrying out the original plan aimed at organizing a broad front of workers for the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

After the eighth convention, a number of left unions, where the conditions that had given rise to them had completely changed, were dissolved. These included the T.U.U.L.-affiliated unions of textile workers, steel workers and miners. Their members joined A.F.L. unions. In early 1935, the T.U.U.L. decided to disband altogether and merge with the A.F.L. This was done in the interests of working-class unity. The former members of T.U.U.L. unions, now joining the conservative A.F.L. unions, brought with them "the fruits of their experience in hard-fought struggles against the employers. Inside the A.F.L. they continued to be among the staunchest fighters for industrial unionism, for trade union democracy, and for policy of struggle against the employers, instead of the collaboration of the top leaders with the employers."<sup>2</sup> The reactionary leaders of the A.F.L. immediately tried to organize an anti-communist drive by sending trade union officials a letter urging them to expel Communists from their unions. This appeal, however, found no response.

<sup>1</sup> See, William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism*, New York, 1947, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

The New Deal provided more legal leeway for the Communist Party. The administration in Washington refrained from using the methods of anti-communist hysteria employed by its predecessors, fully aware of their unpopularity in the grass roots. The Labor Department rejected the demands of the "super-patriots" to resort to the once frequently practiced deportation of progressive labor leaders. In particular, it did not support the call made by West-Coast employers to banish Harry Bridges from the U.S.

All this did not mean that the situation on the local scene had changed appreciably for the better. Anti-communism was still the vehicle of the propaganda campaign waged by employer associations and the reactionary press. By 1935, about 13 bills aimed against the Communists had been introduced in Congress. Many state legislatures, instead of devoting their time to economic problems, engaged in debates on bills to ban Communist activities.

The Communists had to surmount many ordeals and difficulties. In the complex and contradictory conditions, they could not always unerringly find the right tactic. But despite all this, the Communist Party made a historic contribution to the cause of the struggle of the working class for its economic interests and political rights. In these stormy years a galaxy of young fighters from the ranks of the working class and progressive intelligentsia joined the communist movement, taking their place in the Party leadership alongside William Foster, Jack Stachel, Robert Minor, L. Weinstone and Israel Amter. It was in those years that Eugene Dennis, Gus Hall, Henry Winston, H. Lumer, Carl Winter, Joseph North, George Morris, Claude Lightfoot, Pettis Perry, Benjamin Davis, James Jackson and others received their baptism of fire.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN THE EARLY 30s

The beginning of the economic crisis in 1929 coincided with a certain rise in the activity of the Socialist Party. In conditions of the growing social contradictions and intensified class struggle in the country, which were accompanied by a radicalization of the sentiments of broad sections of American society, the Socialists undertook a series of efforts to at least partially revive the influence and membership of their organization.

Soon after Clarence Senior became executive secretary of the S.P. in the summer of 1929, the Socialists launched an organizing drive to attract new members. By the end of 1929, the membership was already about 10,000, that is, more than in any year since 1923.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to increasing its organizing and propaganda activity, the S.P. attempted to move closer to the mass movement that developed with the beginning of the economic crisis. It devoted much attention to the problem of unemployment insurance.

An unemployment insurance bill proposed by the Socialists in 1930 called for the payment of unemployment benefits for an unlimited term amounting to 50 to 70 percent of a worker's

<sup>1</sup> See, *New Leader*, November 30, 1929, December 21, 1929; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America. A History*, New York, 1955, pp. 207, 250.

wages (depending on the size of his family), but no less than \$ 12 a week.

For a long time, however, the attitude of the Socialist leaders to Hoover's "relief and rehabilitation" program was confined to passive criticism and appeals to reason. Only in June 1931 did the national executive committee of the S.P. issue a "Call to Action", urging party organizations to participate in the creation of unemployed councils and step up the struggle for social insurance.

The program adopted at the Socialist convention in 1932 on the eve of the presidential elections stated: "Unemployment and poverty are inevitable products of the present system." The program, which became the Socialist Party's election platform, included demands for federal government allocations of \$5,000 million for direct assistance to the needy, \$5,000 million to expand the public works program, special measures to encourage the cooperative and self-help movements among the unemployed,<sup>1</sup> and a 30-hour work week without reduction in pay.

It also envisaged special benefits for small farmers and homeowners, a moratorium on the sale of their property for delinquent taxes, low interest rates and insurance coverage against natural calamities for farmers, the creation of a stable farm market by introducing a system of government subsidies, a change from property taxes to income, inheritance and excess profits taxes in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> The program contained propositions in support of democratic and trade union rights, the social and economic equality of Negroes, the diplomatic recognition of the U.S.S.R., and a number of demands of an anti-war nature.

"We are facing a breakdown of the capitalist system," the program said.<sup>3</sup> Expressing itself in the spirit of socialist principles, the convention came out for the nationalization of the basic industries and the establishment of "democratic

<sup>1</sup> *Socialist Planning and a Socialist Program. A Symposium*, ed. by H. W. Laidler, New York, 1932, pp. 243-44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.



control" over production. While it was not a document of a militant Marxist party, the 1932 Socialist program could become, under certain conditions, the basis for organizing a mass anti-monopoly democratic movement.

The first unemployed councils had begun to appear long before the June decision of the national executive committee. Later, such councils, led by local organizations of the S.P., broadened their influence among the unemployed. In a number of big cities, action committees headed by Socialists played an active part in the mass movement for social insurance and relief by organizing conferences, meetings and demonstrations. Thus, in New York, the Socialists and a number of trade union organizations sponsored an Emergency Conference on Unemployment, which convened in March 1930, with 585 delegates in attendance. The conference urged Governor Franklin Roosevelt to adopt a series of urgent measures: to clean up the slums, expand the urban housing construction program, provide jobs for the jobless, and render immediate assistance to the unemployed by distributing food and clothing and paying off rent debts.

It was only at the end of the crisis and in the first years of the New Deal that the Socialist Party and its organizations became actively involved in the unemployed movement, at first in separate states and then on a nation-wide scale. In 1933 and 1934, Socialist-led leagues headed the unemployed movement in Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Wisconsin and Florida. The unemployed leagues had considerable influence in the states of Washington, Tennessee and Texas, and an important role was played by militant organizations of unemployed created by Socialists in Illinois (the Workers' Alliance) and Pennsylvania (League of Unemployed Citizens of Pittsburgh, an organization that united over 50,000 persons in early 1934).

In Illinois and New York, the leagues established unity of action with Communist-led organizations of unemployed and with the C.P.L.A. In a number of cases, steps toward organizational unity were made. The Socialist-led unemployed leagues in Chicago, New York and other cities supported the socialist labor bill on social insurance; in 1936, the bill was officially endorsed by the Workers' Alliance of America, a

national organization of unemployed formed by the Socialists in 1935.

During the economic crisis, the leadership of the Socialist Party, as before, frequently remained unwilling to lead or take part in the strike movement. Nonetheless, a number of campaigns to support workers' strike actions were organized in 1931 and 1932 in various states. Young People's Socialist League organizations were the most active. Young Socialists organized fund-raising to aid striking miners in Kentucky and West Virginia, and textile workers in New Jersey and Massachusetts. They led picket lines in the coal regions of Pennsylvania and Ohio, and at textile mills in Allentown, Patterson and Lawrence and took part in strikes by municipal employees, fur and needle workers, sales clerks, etc.

Despite the opportunism and inconsistency of leaders like Morris Hillquit and others of the Old Guard, there was considerable activity and definite progress toward alignment with the mass movement in the Socialist Party, particularly in local organizations. In 1932 and 1933, the Socialists acquired some importance in the actions of the unemployed and in the strike movement. In addition, they continued to expand their educational work and membership drive. During the crisis years, their influence and membership grew. Socialist candidates did increasingly well in municipal and state elections, especially in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and California. In 1930, Socialists from Milwaukee won nine seats in the Wisconsin state legislature; in Reading, Pennsylvania, two Socialists were elected. In 1931, Socialist candidates were elected mayors of five cities.

In the presidential election of 1932, Socialist Party candidates Thomas and Maurer received over two percent of the total votes cast (884,000). Their main support came from various kinds of liberal organizations, such as the League for Independent Political Action. Part of their votes came from labor parties in Illinois, Minnesota and West Virginia.

By 1933, S.P. membership had grown to 18,000.<sup>1</sup> Along with intellectuals and students, many trade union members and unemployed workers had joined. In many cases, the new

<sup>1</sup> David A. Shannon, *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

members of local organizations were exclusively young people and workers. Young Socialists openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the inertness of the Party leaders; on the other hand, they energetically joined the mass working-class struggle during the crisis and the New Deal. During the crisis years, a Left Wing was formed, consisting primarily of young people. It also included such Socialist leaders as Powers Hapgood and M. Colman, who saw the need, under the new conditions, for changes in the socialist theory and practice. The "militant left" demanded of the Old Guard leadership a decisive turn toward alliance with the mass movement, a policy of class struggle, and repudiation of the philosophy of gradualism which excluded the use of radical political means to effect social reorganization.

The first open clash between the Left and Right wings took place in December 1930 at a convention of the New York City Socialist organization. The Militants sharply criticized the convention's decisions on the trade union questions and its attitude toward the Soviet Union. In one resolution, the Left-wing delegates pointed out the limitations of purely educational methods of S.P. work in the trade unions. They argued that the party should take the initiative in developing the strike movement and drawing the unorganized into industrial trade unions, as well as in all other areas of economic and political struggle.

In another resolution, the leftists demanded that the leadership go beyond the usual declarations favoring diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union and adopt a clear-cut, friendly position with respect to the world's first workers' state; the resolution stressed the importance of the "growing success of the Soviet experiment" to the development of the workers' and Socialist movement in the United States.

At the national convention in May 1932, the Militants united with the Progressives, a centrist group headed by Norman Thomas. On one of the main questions debated—that of the attitude of the S.P. to the Soviet Union—a resolution introduced by the Left was adopted. It endorsed the efforts being made in the Soviet Union to create the economic foundations of a socialist society, and recognized that the success of the Soviet "experiment" would give an immense impetus to the acceptance of socialism by workers in other

countries. The resolution called on workers to guard against capitalist attacks on Soviet Russia.

The convention resolutions indicated a certain shift to the left among American Socialist and growing influence of the S.P.'s "militant Left".<sup>1</sup> The convention, however, rejected a resolution introduced by the Militants on the trade union question, which urged the party to stimulate and press the organizing of workers, especially in the basic industries, along industrial union lines. Most of the delegates, however, supported James Oneal's resolution which defended the outworn position of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of the trade unions and incorporated the idea that the Party should accommodate itself to the trade union sentiment.

The activity of the Socialist Party increased considerably in 1933 when its organizations took part in the strike and labor movement in many industries.

In Massachusetts, the Socialists created an independent union of tannery workers, which in the spring of 1933 conducted a successful strike for higher wages and union rights. In Pennsylvania, almost all of the organizers of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' union, who in the summer of 1933 launched a membership recruitment drive, were members of the Socialist Party. During strikes in the transportation, radio and shipbuilding industries in Reading and Philadelphia in July 1933, local Socialists organized demonstrations of solidarity.

The taxi-drivers' strikes in New York enjoyed the active support of the Trade Union Committee of the S.P.'s state organization. In 1933 and 1934, socialist organizations took part in and led strikes of auto workers in Michigan (Detroit) and Wisconsin, and miners in Illinois, as well as strike actions in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Cleveland, Birmingham and in the states of Massachusetts, New Jersey and Tennessee.

The Socialists played an active part in creating unions of oil workers and furniture makers (Oklahoma and Massachusetts); in organizing campaigns of the International Ladies Garment

<sup>1</sup> The resolution was passed by a vote of 117 to 64 (David A. Shannon, *Op. cit.*, p. 215).



Workers' Union and the American Federation of Teachers; in setting up independent industrial unions and local unions joining the A.F.L. as federal unions in the rubber, radio, electrical, shipbuilding, food, transportation, auto, and aluminum industries in Michigan, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

At that time the party considerably intensified its activity among the farmers. In Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Texas, Socialist organizations worked with the Farmers' Union. In Alabama, they supported a big vegetable farmers' strike. With their help, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was formed in Arkansas in July 1934 (later called the National Union of Agricultural Workers).

The Socialists expanded their agrarian program. They advanced the demand to cancel the debts of small farms and introduce firm guaranteed prices for agricultural produce that would be in line with prices of industrial goods. In propagating socialism among the farmers, the S.P. relied on the resolutions adopted by its June 1934 convention. The resolution, "The Socialist Party and the Farmer Problem", said that the problem could not be resolved under the existing system of 'production for profit'. For the first time, it spoke of the need to nationalize the large plantations cultivated by the toil of farm laborers and sharecroppers, and to make the property available to cooperatives and small farmers.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the program, all industrial enterprises connected with the production and processing of agricultural produce would also be subject to nationalization.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that manifestations of opportunism and sectarianism in the policy of the S.P. leadership prevented the party from becoming a more active and dynamic social force and the socialist movement from striking deeper roots among the masses of workers and farmers.

During the period in which the N.I.R.A. was in effect, the S.P. instructed its members and built its political campaigns in

<sup>1</sup> The 1936 S.P. platform called for the nationalization of all farms and estates belonging to plantation owners and corporations (*Socialist Call*, June 6, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> *New Leader*, June 16, 1934.

line with the decisions of the July plenary session of the national executive committee (1933) and the resolutions of the 18th party convention (June 1934), which basically assessed the New Deal measures objectively and stressed the necessity of creating mass "industrial and political organizations of workers" to help in their struggle for social and economic rights.

The 18th convention adopted a number of resolutions on the trade union question. One resolution said that the Socialists should actively promote a more effective form of organization on an industrial basis, help in organizing the unorganized and in establishing trade unions in mass production industries, oppose all forms of racial discrimination, advocate trade union democracy, and equal representation for newly-formed organizations in the A.F.L. and cooperate with trade unions in defense of democratic and civil rights. At the same time, the tasks of trade union committees were broadened, so that they might become centers for uniting the forces of the Socialists and coordinating their actions in the trade unions with the aim of carrying out Socialist party policy.

The resolution said nothing, however, about the A.F.L., specifically about its role in the movement to form unions on an industrial basis. The Party's Left Wing demanded this. Andrew Biemiller, Haim Kantorovich and Maynard Kreuger proposed including a paragraph sharply criticizing the ideology, organizational structure and leadership of the A.F.L. Members of the national executive committee—James D. Graham, Leo Krzycki and others—found such criticism to be "tactless". The paragraph was ultimately eliminated by a vote of 76 to 59. As in 1932, the convention obliged the members of the party to "observe the highest form of ethics in the trade union movement" (read: the A.F.L., or more correctly, its leaders).<sup>1</sup>

In point of fact, the leadership of the Socialist Party took a passive attitude to the struggle that broke out in the A.F.L. after the formation in 1935 of the Committee for Industrial Organization, headed by John L. Lewis. The resolution on trade unions approved by the 19th S.P. convention (May 1936) was essentially a repetition of the previous one.<sup>2</sup> Only in late

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, June 9, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> See, *Socialist Call*, June 6, 1936.

November 1936 did the national executive committee adopt a decision to support the C.I.O. and its drive to form industrial unions.

The inevitable result of the above-mentioned negative factors in S.P. activity was to constrict the already shaky base of the socialist movement in the trade unions in 1935 and 1936.

Isolation from the Negro movement was another factor restricting the Party's influence. Only in individual cases did socialist organizations take part in actions against racial segregation and discrimination. The Socialist 1932 and 1936 election platforms included demands to grant Negroes all economic, political and social rights, observance of the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, and the passing of anti-lynch laws.

However, the Socialists continued to regard the Negro question as part of the labor question. The party made no few statements about the need for struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in labor movement; in practice, however, the work done was insignificant. *The American Socialist Quarterly* wrote in 1935 that many Socialists in the American Federation of Labor remained passive or criminally indifferent in the face of open or veiled discrimination against Negroes.

The leftists acted more decisively, relating the question to the need for active struggle for industrial unions. One of them, E. Dufler, wrote: "Craft unionism with its trade autonomy and isolation will necessarily keep the Negroes separated in occupational groups into which they have been forced by economic circumstances. It is the task of industrial unions to unite the workers and align them solidly against the master class."<sup>1</sup> But the leftists, too, were a long way from recognizing the independent nature of the racial problem. Dufler said that political emancipation for the Negro would come only after he won industrial equality through industrial unions.

During the crisis years, the Socialist Party stood aloof from the movement for a third political party, viewing it from a negative, narrowly sectarian position. Some steps toward rapprochement with the mass organizations advocating such a party were made in the beginning of the New Deal when, at the

initiative of the Socialists, a Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers was convened in Washington in May 1933.

Among its participants (about 4,000 persons) were representatives of the Socialist Party, the League for Independent Political Action, the Farm Holiday Association, the League for Progressive Labor Action, the unemployed leagues, and official representatives of the clothing and ladies garment workers' unions. The influence of the Socialists was predominant. The Congress adopted a series of resolutions in the spirit of the Socialist platform and established a standing committee for coordinating the independent political actions of the left and liberal opposition forces at the state level. The committee, on which the S.P. had its official representatives, was regarded by the sponsors of the Congress as the first step toward creating a mass "radical party".

The committee was active in Ohio, Michigan, Massachusetts, Maryland and Connecticut. From the end of 1933, however, its activity sharply declined. In the following years, the S.P. leadership isolated itself, in effect, from the movement for an independent party. In official statements in 1935 and 1936, the Socialist leaders referred to the lack of any real prerequisites for forming such a national political organization, although formally they did not exclude the possibility of the S.P.'s participation in the movement "under certain conditions".<sup>1</sup>

During the economic crisis and the beginning of the New Deal, the Socialist leadership adhered to the old line of refusing to cooperate with the Communists and other left elements, although many local Socialist organizations, against the will of the party leaders, took an active part in the movement to form a united front. In April 1933, the national executive committee, by a vote of 6 to 5, rejected the Communist Party's proposal to organize a meeting to discuss common problems. A certain deviation from the course was the participation of S.P. members in the work of the First

<sup>1</sup> The 19th convention of the S.P. adopted a resolution to support a real farmer-labor party if such a party were formed (*Socialist Call*, June 29, 1935, July 13, 1935, May 30, 1936; D. R. McCoy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 41, 72, 85, 106; H. W. Laidler, *A Program...*, pp. 462-63; Norman Thomas, *After the New Deal, What?*, New York, 1936, p. 219).

<sup>1</sup> *The American Socialist Quarterly*, March 1935, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 41.



Anti-War Congress, organized at the initiative of the Communist Party in September 1933.

The events in Germany, where the coming to power of the nazis was attended by the destruction of both communist and socialist organizations, the onslaught of reactionary forces in the U.S. itself, plus the pressure from the militant Left Wing within the party forced the American Socialist leaders, like their European counterparts, to re-examine their attitude towards the Communists. At an S.P. convention in June 1934, the Militants in a coalition with the Progressives defeated the Old Guard, depriving it of the majority of seats on the national executive committee. The executive committee elected by the convention was made up basically of supporters of the Left-Progressive bloc.

The new leadership adopted a series of measures toward closer unity with the Communists with the aim of creating a united front of democratic forces. However, these measures were of a dual and inconsistent character; Thomas's influential centrist group, which controlled the decisions of the national executive committee, did not want to go beyond "limited" contacts.

The initiative, as in 1933, was taken by the Communist Party; in June 1934, it sent an S.P. convention in Detroit a proposal for a united front. The convention turned it over to the national executive committee, which was forced to enter into negotiations with the Communists. In September, the S.P. executive committee rejected the proposal to immediately establish a united front on a national scale, and postponed action on the question for three months. At the same time, it expressed itself in favor of joint actions in defense of democratic rights on a regional level.

The decision adopted at the December plenary session of the national executive committee confirmed the rejection of a united front; local organizations of the S.P. could enter into limited contacts with Communists only with the approval of the top officials.

The "militant Left", whose influence was greatest in youth organizations and above all in the Young People's Socialist League, demanded broader cooperation with the Communist Party on a national level. Forty-nine Socialists participating in

the Second Congress Against War and Fascism addressed an appeal to the S.P. leadership to have the whole party join in the united front. "Militant Socialists and Communists must and can work out a united front of agreements and actions," stressed *The American Socialist Quarterly*.<sup>1</sup>

In principle, however, the line of the leftists was not consistent.

The Militants made mistakes of an extremist nature. Thus, the Revolutionary Policy Committee, which was part of the Left-Wing group, advanced the slogan: "Workers' Councils and a Workers' Government".<sup>2</sup>

The Old Guard rejected in principle the idea of any negotiations or agreements with the Communist Party. The question of relations with the Communists became one of the main issues in the political struggle raging in the Socialist Party from 1934 to 1936.<sup>3</sup>

The local organizations of Socialists in New Orleans, Louisiana, Camden, New Jersey, and in the states of Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina and South Carolina, and various parts of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts cooperated with the Communists both before and after the December decision of the national executive committee, and frequently went beyond the limitations prescribed by the leadership. In Illinois, for example, Socialist candidates ran on a single slate with the Communists in the 1934 municipal elections in a number of small mining towns; in Taylor Springs such a slate won a majority of votes, with Communists and Socialists winning most of the elective offices in the district. Considerable success was also scored in 1935.

Socialist organizations contributed toward uniting Left and progressive forces by participating in the activity of the National Negro Congress, the American Youth Congress, the League for Struggle Against War and Fascism, and the League of American Writers. At the A.F.L. convention in October 1935, the Left Socialists united with the Communists on major issues (for example, the question of a labor party).

<sup>1</sup> *The American Socialist Quarterly*, March 1935, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> James Oneal and G. A. Werner, *Op. cit.*, p. 289; *Socialism and American Life*, Vol. I, p. 376-77.

<sup>3</sup> See, D. R. McCoy, *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

In late 1935 there were signs of further rapprochement between the two parties. On November 27, Communists and Socialists held a joint conference in Madison Square Garden in New York. Leo Krzycki, chairman of S.P. national executive committee, opened the meeting and the leaders of both parties were greeted by 20,000 Communists and Socialists of New York City gathered there.

Louis Waldman and other rightists from the leadership of the New York State organization of the S.P. who objected to the meeting with the Communist leaders, were absent.

The main subject of the debate was the problem of unity between Socialists and Communists. Norman Thomas said that past disputes should not stand in the way of cooperation between the two parties, and that under certain conditions he would endorse a united front with the Communists.

Soon after the conference, unity of action with the Communist Party on certain questions became the official line of the national leadership of the Socialist Party.

In the spring of 1936, as a result of meetings between representatives of the two parties, agreement was reached on joint work in various trade unions, particularly in regard to forming a united white-collar workers' union.

In 1936, the Socialists and Communists agreed to merge the organizations of unemployed which they led; a new Workers' Alliance was headed by Socialist David Lasser. Earlier, agreement had been reached on uniting various student leagues into a single Union of American Students. Both parties officially cooperated in conducting political campaigns for the release of Tom Mooney, Negro worker Angelo Herndon, and the Scottsboro boys, as well as in organizing the July demonstrations in support of the Spanish Republic and in the Action in Defense of Spanish Democracy formed in October 1936.

The progress seen during that period along the lines of united action by the two parties did not mean, however, that the Socialist leadership was ready for further expansion of cooperation with the Communist Party. An S.P. convention in May 1936, for example, rejected a proposal to put up a single slate of Communist and Socialist candidates at the forthcoming presidential election.

In their official statements, the Socialist leaders often mentioned the need for active struggle against the threat of fascism. At the same time, they rejected in principle the idea of a popular front which the Communist Party insisted was needed. The Communists, directing their efforts toward the creation of an anti-fascist coalition, came out with the slogan, "Democracy Against Fascism", which was the only correct one under those conditions. The Socialist Party did not give this course consistent or active support.

The Socialists equally opposed both Roosevelt and the Republican candidate, Landon, drawing no distinction between the New Deal candidate and the representative of the more reactionary political groupings in the country. The Socialists' definition of the first moves of the New Deal as a system of state-capitalist measures was, on the whole, correct; however, they erred in seeing serious fascist tendencies in them. At the same time they underestimated the significance of the progressive shifts in Roosevelt's social policy in 1935 and 1936, when important concessions were made to the demands of the working people.

The Socialist Party reached its greatest membership in 1934, with 22,000 members. Then a sharp decline began. By the end of 1935, membership had dropped to 16,000,<sup>1</sup> in the spring of 1936 it was about 12,000, and in February 1937, less than 6,500. This was the lowest level in the entire history of the Party since its founding in 1901.

In less than three years, the party lost nearly 75 per cent of its members. This catastrophic decline was brought about by a number of circumstances.

The Socialist Party's membership growth during the crisis years had been due to a considerable extent to an influx of liberals and intellectuals; the party platform, which since 1928 officially rejected the principles of class struggle, but favored social reforms, was fully acceptable to them. In the years of the New Deal there began a mass exodus of liberal fellow-travellers into the camp of the Democrats, whose social program included many demands of the Socialists. Besides, the liberals were concerned about the growing vigor of the Socialist Left Wing and its militant class positions.

<sup>1</sup> *Socialism and American Life*, Vol. 1, p. 380.



In the years 1933 to 1935, Jerry Voorhis, Paul Blanchard, Upton Sinclair and a number of other prominent Socialists left the S.P. to join the Democrats and support New Deal candidates. Many of them later were to play a prominent role in the Democratic Party.

In California, the EPIC movement headed by Sinclair ended with the collapse of the local Socialist organization. The sectarian pretentiousness of Socialist leaders and their lack of initiative in organizing a mass movement caused many rank-and-file Socialists to quit the party to join organizations headed by demagogues like Coughlin and Long. The socialist movement in Minnesota was actually dissolved in the Farmer-Labor Party which in 1934 came out with a radical program containing certain demands of a socialist nature.

No less serious a blow was dealt to the influence of the Socialist Party in the trade unions whose leaders traditionally supported Socialists. The party's influence had been considerable in 1933 and 1934 in the clothing and ladies garment workers' unions, several state federations of labor, and the A.F.L. labor councils in a number of large cities (Cleveland, Reading, New Bedford). In 1935, however, when the New Deal administration made a number of important concessions to the labor movement, the trade unions with socialist leanings began to veer toward Roosevelt.

In February 1936, there were only 1,300 trade union members in the Socialist Party. In May, the leaders of three big unions—Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers, and Emil Rieve of the Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers—left the party and came out in support of Roosevelt, who had been nominated by the Democrats for re-election. Soon, Leo Krzycki, vice-president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union and chairman of the national executive committee of the Socialist Party, followed suit.

In the 1936 presidential election, the Socialist candidate for president, Norman Thomas, and his running mate, George Nelson, had the support of only a handful of trade union figures united into the Labor League for Thomas and Nelson. Among them were A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (chairman of the

League), and John Davis of the American Federation of Teachers.

The final blow came in the summer of 1936, when due to a split, the Right-Wing group, including almost half of the party membership, quit the party.

The split was preceded by an intense inner struggle after the party's 18th convention. At the time of the convention, the threat of war and fascism was increasing throughout the world, and it was incumbent upon all progressive and democratic organizations to define their political and tactical lines. At a Socialist convention in May-June 1934, the Militants had demanded a decisive turn toward organizing a mass anti-war and anti-fascist movement. They submitted a Declaration of Principles which stated that Socialists would do their best to break up the war by massed war resistance, including a general strike of labor unions and other groups, in order to make the waging of war a practical impossibility and to convert the capitalist war crisis into a victory for socialism.

In another place, the Declaration made reference to the possibility of non-parliamentary means of gaining political power.

This was all the rightists needed to begin furious attacks on the Declaration. Calling it "anarchistic, illegal and communist", Louis Waldman stated that adoption of the Declaration would mean "the end of the Socialist Party". Centrists Norman Thomas, Leo Krzycki and others sided with the Militants.<sup>1</sup> They regarded the Declaration's anti-war program as a confirmation of the principles of the anti-war resolution adopted in St. Louis in 1917.

The convention adopted the Declaration of Principles by a vote of 99 to 47.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it reinstated the clause in the party constitution (which had been struck in 1928) stating that recognition of the class struggle was a principal condition for membership in the Socialist Party.

<sup>1</sup> Norman Thomas introduced a number of changes into the original text of the Declaration in order to "soften" it (*Socialism and American Life*, Vol. 1, p. 378).

<sup>2</sup> In late 1934, the Declaration was put to a party referendum and was endorsed by a vote of 5,993 to 4, 872.

After the convention, the factional struggle came out into the open. Socialist organizations split into factions in New York, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Texas. The Socialists of Oregon left the party. The Old Guard lost control over the central party apparatus, but maintained its positions in Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Their opponents were stronger in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, as well as in New Jersey, Ohio, California, Florida, Texas, Kansas and Indiana, where S.P. branches had been formed relatively recently.

The struggle raged around the Declaration of Principles and the question of a united front with the Communists. It was the most intense in the New York organization. At the national party convention in May 1936, the New York Socialists sent two delegations, one representing the Old Guard supporters, and the other the Left-Progressive faction. Norman Thomas and the Wisconsin group made an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the differences. After a heated debate, the convention voted to seat the leftists and centrists. The Right-wing group had to quit the convention.<sup>1</sup>

That convention was the prelude to the split of the party itself. In June, the supporters of the Old Guard from New York and Massachusetts (mainly members of the Jewish and Finnish Federations) and the party organizations of Maryland, Pennsylvania and the cities of Reading (the Dutch group) and Pittsburgh announced their withdrawal from the Socialist Party and the founding of a Social Democratic Federation.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the membership of the party was cut nearly by half.

The flight of petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers, the switch of the socialist-inclined trade unions over to Roosevelt, the split in 1936, the heightening of reformist illusions among the masses during the New Deal, and the sectarian errors of the S.P., all had an adverse effect on the results of the socialist campaign during the presidential election of November 1936. The Socialist candidate, Norman Thomas, received only

<sup>1</sup> See, *Socialist Call*, May 30, 1935; David A. Shannon, *Op. cit.*, pp. 243-44.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Laidler, *Social-Economic Movements*, New York, 1946, pp. 597-98; *Socialism and American Life*, Vol. 1, pp. 381-82, 388; *Socialist Call*, June 6, 1936.

0.4 percent of the votes (as compared with 2.1 percent in 1932).

After that, the intensification of sectarian and outright reactionary tendencies in the policy of the Socialist leaders led to the transformation of the Socialist Party into an uninfluential group devoid of ties with the labor and democratic movement.



## CHAPTER XIV

GROWING WORKING-CLASS INFLUENCE  
ON THE NEGRO MOVEMENT

The thirties were an important milestone in the history of the Black population and its civil rights fight.

The economic crisis of 1929-1933 hit the Black population hardest of all. The practice of "last hired, first fired" with respect to Blacks became general. The unemployment rate among the Black population was as high as 27 percent, and rose even higher in the large industrial centers.<sup>1</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of agricultural workers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South found themselves in extremely difficult straits. The introduction of machinery on the cotton plantations brought about a new wave of Black migration from the South that was to continue throughout the 1930s. Discrimination in the administration of unemployment relief lent added impetus to the Black migration.

During the crisis years, the reactionary forces resorted even more frequently to physical reprisals to stifle any protest that arose within the Black masses against the prevailing situation. In only two years' time — 1932 and 1933 — 84 lynchings were registered.<sup>2</sup> Reactionaries hoped to deepen racial dissension between white and Black workers, prevent any development of

unity in the labor and democratic movement, and steer the protest of the working masses along a false path.

Local authorities in the South during the crisis years made wide use of a special form of persecution — the so-called "legal lynching". In 1931, nine Black youths aged 13 to 20 were arrested on false charges in Alabama. After a mock trial at which they were "defended" by a member of the Ku Klux Klan, they were sentenced to death. The authorities in neighboring Georgia did not lag behind the Alabama racists. In 1932, they sentenced the Black Communist Angelo Herndon to a long term at hard labor. He was charged with inciting the "overthrow of the Government", since he had tried to organize white and Black unemployed workers for struggle to get assistance from the authorities. The agitational materials in his possession, even in the opinion of Supreme Court justice Owen J. Roberts, contained nothing subversive.<sup>1</sup>

Both trials stirred progressive America and long remained a central factor of political struggle.

Herbert Hoover's administration helped speed up the withdrawal of Black support from the Republican party. Like most Americans, the Black population looked with hope to the Democrats and their 1932 presidential candidate, Franklin Roosevelt. There was no need for Roosevelt to make any lavish campaign promises. The strength of the Democrats lay in the hopeless weakness of the Republicans. At most, the Blacks could find but one phrase in the Democratic Party platform that could apply to them: "Equal rights to all; special privileges to none."<sup>2</sup>

The New Deal unquestionably contained some points that drew a positive response among the Blacks. But no radical or even essential changes in the status of the Blacks came about under Roosevelt either. Racial discrimination continued to flourish, both in unemployment relief and in the drawing up of the "fair competition codes". The first code in the textile industry, which became the model, said that working condi-

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book*, II, New York, 1934, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Labor Fact Book*, II, p. 139.

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of American History*, ed. by H.S. Commager, Vols. 1, 2, New York, 1949, Vol. 2, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

ons for certain low-wage categories of workers were not regulated.

Racial discrimination also found reflection in New Deal social legislation. Article 210 of the second section of the Social Security Act specified that the provisions of the law did not extend to agricultural laborers and domestic servants—job categories in which millions of Blacks were employed.<sup>1</sup> These categories were also left outside the National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act).

Roosevelt was personally loyal to the Blacks, but having to maneuver he rejected radical measures on the Negro question that the progressive forces in his political coalition demanded. He confined himself primarily to making general statements. Speaking at Harvard University on October 26, 1936, he said that there should be no forgotten people, no forgotten races among American citizens. However, the Black continued to be a "forgotten race" even during the New Deal years, a fact noted by many historians.<sup>2</sup>

The position of the A.F.L. officials on the Negro question remained the same during the years of the crisis. Democratic organizations of Blacks were themselves caught unawares and unprepared for the harsh ordeals. They were unable to put up a reliable barrier to the economic and political offensive of the monopolies.

But the economic crisis had moved all America to action, and this had an effect also on the attitude of the labor movement to the Negro question. In their educational and practical work, the Communists invariably put in the forefront the questions of drawing Negroes into trade unions and other organizations and of their participation in the mass movement. The T.U.U.L. had long fought to organize Black workers into industrial unions. It created industrial unions in the steel, meatpacking and other industries in which relatively large numbers of Blacks were employed.

<sup>1</sup> See, *Documents of American History*, Vol. 2, pp. 494-95, 508.

<sup>2</sup> See, Sidney Sufrin and Robert Sedgwick, *Labor Economics and Problems at Mid-Century*, New York, 1956, p. 259; Andre Maurois, *From the New Freedom to the New Frontier: A History of the United States from 1912 to the Present*, New York, 1963, p. 179; E. Tatum, *The Changed Political Thought of the Negro, 1915-1940*, New York, 1951, p. 160.

The Negro department of the T.U.U.L. headed by James W. Ford carried on extensive educational work among the Blacks, urging them to join trade unions and helping them overcome anti-union sentiments, which were still strong among part of the Black workers and were reinforced by bourgeois propaganda. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1932 that a certain part of the Negro intellectuals, while not coming out directly against trade unions, had a tendency to keep silent about the activity of the unions, even those in which racial discrimination had been overcome. In particular, he cited the 1931 miners' strikes in Pennsylvania and Kentucky, in which whites and Blacks fought with equal vigor "for the abolition of feudalism" in the mines and were equally subjected to harsh repression—a struggle that remained unnoticed by the Negro press and intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

The Communists also spread their union organizing activity to the South. The newspaper *Southern Worker*, which Communists began to publish in Chatanooga, Tenn., in 1930 played an exceptionally important role in this drive. Two hundred and fifty Communists<sup>2</sup> working in the Birmingham area were able to do literally the impossible: they marched into the cotton fields of Alabama, the very citadel of the Black Belt, and organized a sharecroppers union there in 1931. The union became a reliable defender of the interests of the plantation workers of Alabama. From a small unit of 30 persons, it grew into a big organization; by 1935 it had 12,000 members, 90 percent of them Blacks.

In 1934, following the experience of the Communist Party, the Left Socialists, with the active support of the Communists, organized a union of Southern tenant farmers. It became an even more influential organization than the Sharecroppers Union. The two unions struggled in a united front for the interests of the agricultural laborers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In 1935, they had a combined membership of 37,000. The entire progressive public of the nation gave them support.

Thanks to the indefatigable energy of the Communists, Blacks took an active part in the unemployed movement which grew dramatically in all the large industrial centers during the

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, March 1932, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions*, Chapel Hill, 1939, pp. 337-38.



crisis years. An important aspect of this struggle were demands to halt evictions because of non-payment of rent. Blacks were always the first to be threatened with eviction.

In May 1933, the Communist-led League of Struggle for Negro Rights organized a march on Washington in which 3,500 people took part. The participants presented President Roosevelt with a Bill of Civil Rights for the Negro People.<sup>1</sup>

The movement of the Black people in the 1930s and its relationship with the labor movement cannot be fully assessed without taking into consideration the struggle that centered around the Scottsboro trial. The Communists exerted great influence on the course of that trial. Upon learning of the arrest and the first sentence passed on the defendants, Robert Minor assessed the situation as follows: "Left to the Bourbons, it would mean not only the death of innocents, but would touch off a giant pogrom against all Negroes in the South, and elsewhere in the nation. Fought properly, the boys can be saved."<sup>2</sup> On April 1, 1931, the International Labor Defense, a progressive organization with skilled lawyers of a radical bent, entered the struggle. It immediately adopted a special kind of defense, tying together the fate of the accused with that of the entire Negro people. The Communists viewed the events in Scottsboro not as an isolated tragedy, but as an important political question. They regarded the fact that there had been no Blacks on the jury as the legal grounds for a re-trial.

Under the pressure of the great public outcry, the Supreme Court reversed the convictions on the grounds that the defendants had not had adequate representation by counsel. New trials were held, and the defendants were again convicted. In April 1935, the Supreme Court reversed these convictions as well, this time on the grounds that there were never any Negroes on the juries in the country where the trials took place. The Supreme Court did not touch on the essence of the question of the fate of the defendants; it simply reversed the convictions. Despite this, the decision of the Supreme Court was regarded by the public as a major victory for the movement organized by the Communists and other left forces.

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Fact Book*, II, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph North, *Robert Minor Artist and Crusader*, New York, 1956, p. 159.

The Communist Party continued actively to advocate the slogan of national self-determination for the Negro people, which hampered their work with the masses and alienated them from other Left and progressive organizations that did not subscribe to this demand. The Communists themselves felt the adverse effect of the self-determination slogan in their great and difficult struggle for Negro rights. At times, steps were made toward discarding it. In early 1932, the Communists who were in the forefront of the fight for Negro rights made an attempt in their newspaper, *Southern Worker*, to return to the former interpretation of the Negro question as one of an oppressed racial minority of the American nation. This effort was subjected to unwarrantedly harsh criticism on the pages of the Party's central organ as a "concession to modern bourgeois racial theories".

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the Party was able to win support among the Negro masses. No small role in this was played by the nomination in 1932 of James W. Ford as the Communist candidate for vice-president of the United States. *The Crisis* said that the nomination of a Negro as vice-president marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Negro in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Negro leaders could not ignore the fact that the Communist Party was a force that differed fundamentally from the rightist trade union leadership, which continued to discriminate against Negroes in the labor movement. The 23rd conference of the N.A.A.C.P. in 1932 noted in an Address of the Conference to the Country that "what the Negro needs primarily is a definite economic program", which would include social insurance. This showed the significance of the mass movement for social insurance which the Communist Party had initiated considerably earlier.

The realities of life compelled the Communists to alter their tactics and eliminate the shortcomings in their practical activity. At the same time they induced Negro bourgeois-democratic organizations to stand closer to the labor movement as the mainstay of the struggle for the emancipation of the Negroes. From the mid-1930s, the relationship between

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, September 1932, p. 279.

the labor and the Negro movements entered a new phase, the main feature of which was the trend toward unity of all democratic forces in the struggle against monopoly reaction and the menace of fascism and war.

The experience of mass political struggle during the economic crisis imperatively called for the unity of all democratic forces and created real prerequisites for it. Following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the Communist Party considerably stepped up its work for uniting all trends in the anti-monopoly and anti-fascist struggle. This had an immediate effect on the Negro movement. Calling for the unity of democratic forces within the framework of a farmer-labor party, the Communists made the equality of Negroes one of the central points of their program.

The growing unity of progressive forces gave rise to a united committee for the defense of the Scottsboro prisoners which was set up at the end of 1935. A leading role in it was played by the International Labor Defense. It also included the N.A.A.C.P., the American Civil Liberties Union, church and other organizations. Millions of people stood behind this committee. Communists, Socialists, trade union activists, liberals, clergymen — all made their contribution to the struggle to save the lives of the boys. The N.A.A.C.P. noted that the key role in this mass movement belonged to the Communists.<sup>1</sup> As a result of united mass action, all the innocent boys were saved. They were saved by the actions of the popular masses and a skillful legal defense.

The fight for the release of Angelo Herndon, who was also defended by a united committee composed of representatives of radical and liberal organizations, also came to successful conclusion. In both cases, Benjamin Davis, a well-educated young lawyer, distinguished himself brilliantly. Davis came from a rich and well-known Negro family in Georgia and joined the Communist Party while working on the cases. He later became a Party leader and was twice elected to the New York City Council. The Supreme Court by decision of April 26, 1937, freed Herndon, pointing out that the statute under which he had been brought to trial set such "vague and

<sup>1</sup> James W. Ford, *The Negro and the Democratic Front*, New York, 1938, p. 104.

indeterminate" boundaries "to the freedom of speech and assembly that the law necessarily violates the guarantees of liberty embodied in the Fourteenth Amendment".<sup>1</sup>

During these trials, the Negro masses became increasingly convinced that liberation lay through active participation in the labor movement. Thousands of Negroes joined the Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> Among the politically conscious Negro workers and intellectuals the myth of a "Red menace" was to a large extent dispelled.

The noticeable radicalization of the Negro community had an effect on the activity of the main Negro organizations. Beginning with its St. Louis conference, the N.A.A.C.P. definitely turned toward more active participation in the labor movement. The conference resolved that the Association should create councils in major industrial centers, and that their functions should include carrying out a campaign among Negroes explaining their role in the economy and the identity of interests of white and Black workers.

The National Urban League also created Workers' Councils in dozens of industrial centers. The basic program of these councils, which became mass organizations, was "to acquaint Negro workers with the economic nature of their problems, with essential unity of white and Negro workers' interests, and with the history, technique and necessity of collective workers' action; and to establish understanding and intelligent cooperation among workers of both races, within and without the ranks of organized labor".<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the main Negro organizations joined the mass struggle and established closer ties with the labor movement created, as James W. Ford put it, "an entirely different situation". This helped the Communists correct past errors in their assessment of Negro organizations. James Ford wrote in 1938: "We must be very critical of our past work so that we may more easily make the change. It is necessary for the Party membership, particularly the Negro members, to see the need and possibility of strengthening our influence in the existing

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of American History*, Vol. 2, p. 558.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph North, *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Ford, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.



Negro organizations, by joining them where possible and becoming useful members."<sup>1</sup>

The involvement of Negroes in the labor movement, the political upsurge of the Negro masses, and the radicalization of the traditional Negro organizations made it possible to raise the question of establishing a stronger and more lasting organizational unity of all Negro democratic forces. After extensive preparatory work in which the Communists played a considerable role, such an organization was formed. It was the National Negro Congress (N.N.C.). There were 817 delegates from 585 organizations in 28 states and Washington, D.C., present at its first convention in 1936.

The convention resolved that the N.N.C. would not be an organ of any party, but would be a general democratic organization fighting for the Negro people's complete equality. The N.N.C. program envisaged the waging of a mass struggle against fascism and war and for creating an independent third party. It also called for a national campaign for Negro civil rights, and for the organization of Negroes into trade unions.

Delegates from trade unions in the industrial centers of the North predominated at the convention. This was reflected in the N.N.C. program and particularly in the course of the debates, when loud voices were raised in favor of industrial unions, independent political action, and organizing agricultural laborers and domestic servants. A project was approved to set up workers' committees in regions with a high proportion of Negro population.

A. Philip Randolph delivered a bill of indictment against the Negro bourgeois leadership in his speech: "The cause of the organization of Negro workers into the trade union movement has suffered greatly and been incalculably hindered by Negro leadership. The old-guard conservative groups are simply opposed to organized labor for the same reason that Mellon or Morgan is opposed to it.... The Negro intellectuals, too, have rendered doubtful service to the cause of the organization of Negro workers, since they have been content merely to proclaim their opposition to the A.F. of L. because of the existence of prejudice in various unions affiliated with it which, of course, nobody denies or condones.... But along with a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

policy of destruction with respect to discrimination, segregation and Jim-Crowism in the trade unions, there should also be developed a program of construction. Obviously, the only sound constructive program in dealing with the problem of Negro workers is organization."<sup>1</sup> Randolph became president of the N.N.C. and John P. Davis, secretary. Among the more influential leaders of the Congress were Communists James Ford, Edward Strong and Benjamin Davis.

The consistently democratic direction of the N.N.C. promoted the further radicalization of the old Negro organizations, which as a rule were associated with it. The Baltimore conference of the N.A.A.C.P., for example, paid a great deal of attention to the labor question and hailed "the heroic struggle of white and Negro sharecroppers to secure for themselves just and humane conditions". In a special resolution on labor unions, the conference registered this appeal: "We urge support and active participation in the effort for organization of industrial unions in the American labor movement without regard to race or color."<sup>2</sup>

The shifts in the line of the Negro bourgeois-democratic organizations were not one-sided. A simultaneous process of eliminating racial barriers was under way in the progressive trade unions. Besides this, exceptionally important was the fact that the Communist Party and other workers' organizations that supported the N.N.C. came out in defense of the interests not only of the proletariat but also of the intellectuals, the Negro bourgeoisie and the Negro church. And no less than six million Negroes were church-goers. This knocked the ground out from under the agitation of conservative circles in the Negro community about a "Red menace".

The fact that in its practical activity the Communist Party withdrew the slogan of national self-determination of Negroes also greatly helped in establishing close unity between the Communists and Negro organizations and the growth of the Communist influence in the latter. In formulating the demands of the Party on the Negro question in public speeches over the radio or in the press during the 1936 election campaign, the Communist vice-presidential candidate James Ford did not

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> *The Crisis*, September 1936, pp. 277, 283.

advance the thesis of Negro national self-determination. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Party in December 1936, the following demands of the Negro people were put forward: "(1) real emancipation; (2) full exercise of their right to complete equality, full right to organize, vote, serve on juries and hold public office, equal right to jobs, equal pay for equal work; (3) the establishment of heavy penalties against mob murder, floggers, kidnappers, with the death penalty for lynchers; (4) enforcement of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution of the United States; (5) building of a People's Front to preserve and extend democracy in America."<sup>1</sup>

The real strength of the Negro movement in the second half of the 1930s came from the fact that it was based on the working-class movement and on the struggle for industrial unions and the unity of all democratic forces. Negro labor and democratic organizations made their contribution to the creation of new industrial unions. These unions, being under the strong influence of left forces, came out against racial discrimination in the labor movement. Their leaders knew that in a number of leading industries it was hard to organize unions without a radical change in the approach to Negroes. At the N.A.A.C.P. conference in 1936, one labor leader, John Brophy, called on the association to cooperate in the unionizing drive which had begun that year.

Several organizing committees were set up in 1936, but the number one problem was that of unionizing the steel industry. The Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, headed by Philip Murray, was encountering great difficulties, one of which involved the problem of how to go about organizing the Negroes, who made up one-fifth of the manpower in that industry.

The N.N.C. and several other Negro organizations supported the S.W.O.C. from the outset. But many obstacles stood in the way of Blacks joining the union—the traditional distrust of the trade union leadership, prejudices held by part of the white workers, the vacillation of the rightist leaders of Negro organizations, and primarily the threats and terror on the part

<sup>1</sup> James W. Ford, *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

of the employers and their police-supported armed gangs. Many churches and newspapers helped spread old fears among the Negro population, proclaiming that to join a union where the influence of the "Reds" was strong meant to bring down the wrath of the employers and the authorities on the whole Negro community. Thus, the rightist forces of the Negro upper strata were against both the A.F.L. because it practised racial discrimination, and the new trade unions coming into being because they were too "radical".

The stooges of the steel companies helped spread capitulatory sentiments of this kind in every way possible. This intensified friction and discord within the N.N.C., for the rightists felt that the organization had embarked upon too radical a road. Nonetheless, the N.N.C. launched a vigorous campaign among Negro steel workers. Over a period of a few days, 20,000 leaflets were distributed with calls to join the union. Participating in this campaign were A. Philip Randolph, James Ford and other prominent leaders of the N.N.C. John P. Davis published a long article in which he wrote: "Negro steel workers cannot sit between two stools. They must choose between joining the union with their white fellow workers and taking the side of their slave driving employers. One road leads to a bright new day, the other leads to ruin."<sup>1</sup>

The decisive role in the turn of the Negro steel workers toward industrial unions was played by a conference held in Pittsburgh in February 1937, organized by the S.W.O.C. and N.N.C. and attended by representatives of all sections of the Negro population. Murray delivered a major speech in which, mindful of the spirit of the times, he said that unionization would not only lead to economic advancement but had prospects of political emancipation for the Negroes. It was declared at the conference that it was necessary to overcome the resistance of that part of the Negro upper crust which cow-towed to the steel magnates and set up all kinds of obstacles to keep Negroes from joining trade unions. The conference approved the activity of the S.W.O.C.

Before long, about half of the Negro steel workers became union members. The union organizers said that they found no

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, September 1936, p. 276.



greater difficulty in organizing the Negroes in the Nothern steel mills than the other workers.<sup>1</sup>

The activity of the union in the steel industry shattered the myth that it was impossible to overcome racial barriers among the American workers. Whites and Blacks learned to come together in a united front against the steel bosses and their agents. This unity was put to the test in May 1937 during the strikes in Little Steel companies. In Chicago, where delegates to the Pittsburgh conference had carried out extensive educational and organizing work, the Negroes joined the union en masse and conducted themselves courageously on the picket lines. These events convincingly showed that the proper way to overcome racial prejudice was to form militant trade unions.

With the help and under the leadership of the Communist Party, Negroes joined the trade union movement in many other industries as well. The greatest number of Negroes joined unions in which the influence of the Communists and other left elements was the strongest—the longshoremen's, steel workers', auto workers', seamen's and others.

The new labor organizations made headway in eliminating racial discrimination in the labor movement. The National Negro Congress noted in November 1938 that in the brief period since their formation, the new unions had overcome the barriers that had prevented Negro workers from uniting with their white brothers in the ranks of organized labor, and that these unions had won the confidence of broad masses of Negro workers. In the prewar years they organized about half a million Negro workers, which made up 12.5 percent of the total membership of the industrial unions.<sup>2</sup>

This had its effect on the A.F.L., which now began eliminating some of its more scandalous racial barriers. The liberalization of the A.F.L. policy toward Negro workers was opposed by the more reactionary A.F.L. leaders. In the South, A.F.L. officials were indignant over the acceptance of Negroes into the Federation.

<sup>1</sup> Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Ford, *Op. cit.*, p. 113; *Political Affairs*, March 1949, p. 81.

Thus, by the beginning of World War II, seven to eight hundred thousand Negroes had been brought into the ranks of organized labor. This meant that between 1929 and 1939 their number had grown almost tenfold. Since mass unionization began only in 1935-1936, it may be considered that the basic growth had occurred from that point on. This radically changed the formulation of the Negro question and the balance of forces in the Negro movement.

The enhanced role of the unions as a leading force of the Negro movement manifested itself at the second convention of the N.N.C. in 1937. The number of trade union delegates had grown, and the platform gave priority to the demands of workers and the unemployed.

Together with the swing to the left of the entire labor movement, radicalization also touched the Negro workers. In articles published in the central organ of the A.F.L. in 1939, A.P. Randolph raised the question of nationalizing the railroads. He added in this respect: "The Government cannot give the railroad workers, black or white, freedom. It must be won."<sup>1</sup> The concluding words of a speech he delivered at a national conference of railroad workers in May 1939 were a real call to struggle: "Brothers, let us remember that the greatest fear of the oppressors is the unity of the oppressed. Forward!"<sup>2</sup>

The militant mood spread to Negro youth. At a convention in Richmond in 1937, the youth section of the N.N.C. together with the American Youth Congress created an organization called the Southern Negro Youth Congress. Young people from all walks of life took part in the convention, where emphasis was made on the specific difficulties of unionizing the Negroes in the South, since the bulk of the Negro workers there were employed in agriculture and domestic service. But the delegates were determined to fight for the creation of industrial unions and use them as an instrument for attaining equal civil rights for all Negroes.

The influence of the labor movement was felt even in such a moderately liberal organization as the Southern Conference

<sup>1</sup> *American Federationist*, Vol. 46, No. 8, August 1939, p. 814.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 821.

for Human Welfare, which was founded in November 1938 in Birmingham. Among its founders were Eleanor Roosevelt, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and other white liberals. The President of the United States himself sent greetings to the conference. About thirty to forty per cent of the delegates were trade union representatives.

The Negro people of the United States took part in the anti-fascist struggle and in the movements to help Ethiopia and Spain. Negroes fought on the fields of Spain, defending the just cause of the Republic.

The democratic upsurge also had a favorable effect upon American culture, to the development of which Negroes made a big contribution during this period. Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Marian Anderson and other outstanding representatives of American culture became striking examples of the spiritual emancipation of the Negroes.

Thus, in the 20 years between the two world wars, the American labor movement made considerable progress toward the solution of the Negro question. As a result of radical changes in the social structure of the Negro population, objective conditions were created for relating the Negro question directly to the labor movement. To a certain degree the upsurge of the labor movement in the 1930s turned this objective possibility into a political reality.

During the period under examination the positions of the working class in the Negro movement had become immeasurably stronger. While in the 1920s and early 1930s it was the Negro bourgeoisie that had formulated the tasks of the Negro struggle proceeding from their own narrow class aspirations, by the beginning of World War II, it was the demands of the workers that occupied a central place in the Negro movement.

As far as the leading trade union centers are concerned, their contributions to the cause of Negro emancipation were by no means equal.

The A.F.L. leadership took an anti-Negro stance. It did not advance any positive program on the Negro question.

The industrial unions, on the other hand, contributed greatly to the activation of the Negro movement and to the cause of uniting Negro and white working people. They dealt a

serious blow to racism in the labor movement and to the ostracism to which Negroes were subjected. The weak factor in their activity was the absence of a comprehensive program on the Negro question. The dependence of the right wing on bourgeois ideology was felt here.

The Communist Party of the United States was the boldest and most consistent fighter for the equality of Blacks. In the labor movement, the Communists fought for the unity of Blacks and whites from the very first days of the Party's existence.



seen from the industrial production index figures for that period (1947-1949=100):<sup>1</sup>

1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
40	47	56	61	48	58

The index for durable goods fell from 55 in 1937 to 35 in 1938, and from 64 to 57 for non-durables.<sup>2</sup> The crisis in late 1937 and early 1938 hit hard the workers in heavy industry, primarily in industries where the percentage of organized workers was the lowest and the concentration of the proletariat the greatest. It was in those industries that the development of capitalism helped strengthen working-class tendencies toward unity; these were the industries with the greatest mass of fiercely exploited unskilled and semiskilled workers. During the 1937-1938 crisis, the employment level dropped 12 percent,<sup>3</sup> and the number of unemployed grew from 10 million to 13.7 million, to fall to 9 million only in 1939. Wages declined and the position of a substantial part of the working class worsened. It was no accident that 1937 saw the strike struggle reach its highest level. However, the crises and the depression of the thirties, although they constituted an important factor, were not the only cause of the movement for industrial unions.

The entire preceding economic development had also created conditions for the emergence of mass working-class organizations. In the twenties and first half of the thirties changes took place in the structure of the industrial proletariat, and this was instrumental in changing the character of the labor movement. What gave rise to these changes?

In the first half of the thirties, technological progress in U.S. industry slowed down, and companies sought to make up for it by improving production methods and using auxiliary equipment. With production cut back, they avoided hiring additional manpower from the ranks of the unemployed. From their point of view, this was not necessary because they could achieve

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MOVEMENT FOR INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION. THE A.F.L. SPLIT

The second half of the thirties was marked by a sharp turn in the American trade union movement. The working class embarked on the road of creating mass industrial unions. A new stage in the labor movement began, one essentially different from the preceding period of A.F.L. craft-union dominance. The A.F.L. leaders were unable to understand that that period had passed and that new conditions in industry imperatively dictated the need to support the growing determination of the workers to unite.

What were these conditions that favored the success of the movement for industrial unions?

As we have seen, the progressive forces in the working class made attempts to launch such a movement in the 1920s, but they were unsuccessful, primarily because the tendencies toward unity among masses of unskilled workers were still too weak. The working class had yet to learn the lessons of class struggle during the gravest economic crisis in history. The crises and the depression of the thirties generated fear of destitution and insecurity among the masses. Nor did the second half of the decade alleviate these feelings. The economy showed few indications for a steady upswing, as can be

<sup>1</sup> *The Economic Almanac 1960*, New York, 1960, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935-1941*, Cambridge, 1960, p. 31.

a certain increase in production through speedup. At the same time some industries (coal, for example) began to mechanize on a broad scale, which meant that tens of thousands of miners were left with no hope for jobs. In Illinois alone, the percentage of coal loaded mechanically went up from 13.5 percent to 50.8 percent between 1929 and 1931.<sup>1</sup>

Although the economic crisis of 1929-1933 slowed down the concentration of capital, it did not stop it. In 1929, 200 major non-financial corporations owned between 45 and 50 percent of all the shares of non-financial companies, whereas by 1933 the figure had risen to between 55 and 60 percent.<sup>2</sup> "During the first 15-year interval, including the most of the New Deal period," writes Victor Perlo, "the increase in concentration was comparatively slow. The anti-monopoly legislation of the Roosevelt Administration had not turned back the trend towards monopoly, but merely slowed its growth."<sup>3</sup>

The centralization of capital promoted the concentration of the working class as well. The period 1921 to 1937 saw an increase in the proportion of the largest enterprises.<sup>4</sup> In 1921, 48.4 percent of the total number of industrial and office workers in the manufacturing industry were employed at enterprises with a gross output valued at one million dollars or higher. In 1929, this figure was 58.3 percent,<sup>5</sup> and in 1937, 57.4 percent. Thus, by the mid-thirties the bulk of the proletariat was gathered at large, technologically well-equipped enterprises employing 500 or more workers, and producing over 70 percent of the G.N.P.

Under the impact of the above factors, qualitative changes permeated the structure of the American working class. The process of the social and technological division of labor was

<sup>1</sup> Harriet D. Hudson, *The Progressive Mine Workers of America: A Study in Rival Unionism*, Urbana, Illinois, 1952, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paul M. Sweezy, *The Present as History*, New York, 1953, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Perlo, *The Empire of High Finance*, New York, 1957, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1932, p. 751; *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1940, p. 803.

<sup>5</sup> American historian Herbert Harris cites figures showing that by 1929 the largest corporations (8.5 percent of all the corporations in the United States) employed 71 percent of America's wage earners (Herbert Harris, *American Labor*, New Haven, 1939, p. 381).

intensified. New heavy industries came to the forefront, among them the auto, electrical, radio, aviation, oil, chemical, machine tool, precision instrument-making, and production of heavy machinery, especially the road-building machinery and equipment for the mechanization of construction work. Transfusion of investment from less profitable to more profitable industries increased. Employment of labor power always follows the movement of capital. The centralization of capital entails the concentration of production and, hence, the concentration of labor power.

In 1935, there were 167,916 enterprises in the manufacturing industry. Of these 154,348 (92 percent) were small with up to 100 employees), and they employed a total of 2,116,167 persons, or 29.4 percent of all the wage earners in that industry. The other group of enterprises—the large ones (over 100 workers)—was composed of only 13,568 enterprises, or 8 percent of all manufacturing enterprises. However, they employed, 5,087,627 persons, or 70 percent of the wage earners in the manufacturing industry.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, fixed capital was being renewed in a number of old industries, especially in steel, coal and shipbuilding. There, too, the number of large, concentrated plants, mines and shipyards grew. All this brought about structural changes in industry. The share of the branches turning out means of production grew, as did the cost of the means of production in relation to the labor power employed. The specialization and rationalization of production and the introduction of the conveyor system ushered in mass line production and made work operations simpler. Therefore, companies were able to make wide use of low-paid semiskilled labor, which resulted in serious structural changes in the composition of the proletariat. The advocates of industrial unionism stressed that mass production and the mechanization of industry under monopoly control reduced the role and importance of the skilled labor on which craft labor organization was based. This new development, which entailed substantial changes in the occupational structure of

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1940, p. 733 (our computation.—Auth.).



the industrial proletariat, can be seen clearly in the following figures (in percent):<sup>1</sup>

	1920	1930	1940
Skilled Workers	13.4	12.4	11.7
Semiskilled workers	16.0	16.3	21.0
Unskilled workers	30.0	28.7	25.8
Other groups	40.6	42.6	41.5

The trend toward an increase in the number of semiskilled workers in industry was quite evident. The total number of industrial workers (not counting the mining industry) between 1930 and 1940 increased from 19.3 million to only 20.6 million, but substantial changes took place in their occupational structure, the main one being a growth of the semiskilled worker category and a decrease in the number of unskilled workers, with no growth in the number of skilled workers, as can be seen from the following figures (in thousands):<sup>2</sup>

	1930	1940
Skilled workers	6,246	6,203
Semiskilled workers	7,691	9,518
Unskilled workers	5,335	4,875
Total	19,272	20,596

Thus, the main body of workers were semiskilled or unskilled, and it was precisely this category that comprised the unorganized mass of the working class.

The fact that there was no growth in the number of industrial workers during that decade is also confirmed by data on the manufacturing industry. While in 1929 there were 10,534,000 people employed in manufacturing and 8,907,000 in 1935, in 1939 the figure was 10,078,000, or almost the 1929 level again.<sup>3</sup> These figures do not include the unemployed.

The changes in the composition of the industrial proletariat made imperative shifts in the structure of labor unions. Also, the increasing proportion in the working class of democratical-

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Labor Review*, December 1947, p. 657; O. Joder, *Manpower Economics and Labor Problems*, New York, 1950, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*, Washington, 1960, pp. 76, 77.

<sup>3</sup> *The Economic Almanac*, New York, 1960, p. 248.

ly-minded low-paid semiskilled and unskilled segments was destined to contribute to an upsurge of the militant spirit in the American labor movement in the 1930s. Among other important sources reinforcing the proletariat's struggle for industrial unions was immigration.

One characteristic feature of the structure of the working class—its extremely varied composition by nationality—was still strongly in evidence. On the whole, the period of the late thirties was characterized by slowdown in immigration. As already noted, this reduction was provided for by legislation, which established quotas under which an average of 160,000 persons a year could enter the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s. Counting those to whom the quotas did not apply, actually an average of 300,000 immigrants per year were admitted.

As a result of the immigration decline, the ratio of second-generation Americans to total population also decreased. Thus, in 1940, immigrants made up 8.6 percent of the population (as compared with 13 percent in 1920), and second-generation Americans made up 17.5 percent (as compared with 21.5 percent in 1920).<sup>1</sup> Even so, the proportion of foreign-born whites in the U.S. population was still quite high.

The influx of different nationalities was uneven. The ruling circles tried to influence this process directly by setting quotas which gave clear preference to Anglo-Saxons and people from Northern and Western Europe, while restricting immigration from Asia, Africa and Southeastern Europe. Thus, the annual quotas established by the 1929 law allowed the entrance of a total of 153,714 immigrants; 127,266 of these came under the quotas for Northern and Western Europe.

The proportion of Mexicans grew most impressively in the period between the wars. In the 1920s about a million immigrants came into the country from Mexico, not counting groups entering under contracts. The bulk of these became agricultural laborers. After a considerable outflow of Mexicans during the years of the crisis, the demand for Mexican immigrants rose again. It was determined, as Taft and Robbins

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1954, p. 40.

testify forthrightly, by the fact that Mexicans "were available in large numbers, at low cost, and because they were tractable and willing to do hard dirty work".<sup>1</sup> The explanation for the "tractability" lay in the extreme poverty of the Mexicans in their own country and to no smaller extent in the discrimination to which they were subjected in the United States. Regarded in their overwhelming majority as *braceros*—manual laborers—the Mexicans indeed faced the necessity of taking on the hardest and lowest paid jobs.

Certain categories of "old" immigrants went into the manufacturing industries, due both to their acquired skills and to the simplification of production operations in those industries. On the whole, however, the lot of the immigrant worker, especially the newly arrived, remained in mining, construction and the services field.

The growth in the proportion of skilled personnel that occurred among the foreign-born was explained to some extent by the peculiarities of prewar immigration, for predominating in it were immigrants from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Hungary who had fled from political persecution in fascist states or in the face of the impending fascist aggression. A total of 140,000 such refugee-immigrants came to the United States between 1933 and 1940, and among them was a high percentage of intellectuals.

The position of the immigrants as a whole was determined by many factors, including the discrimination practiced against the more than three million immigrants who had not become naturalized citizens in the 1930s. The American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign-Born pointed, for example, to the fact that "non-citizens" could not receive federal assistance or jobs on federal projects. The job preference given to U.S. citizens in federal public works projects was embodied in one of the most important acts of the New Deal—the N.I.R.A. Enforcement of this provision in effect led to infringements upon the rights of several millions of immigrants. Moreover, in many instances, employers also refused to hire "non-citizens".

<sup>1</sup> Donald Taft, Richard Robbins, *International Migrations. The Immigrant in the Modern World*, New York, 1935, p. 596.

In more than 30 states, the right of immigrants to get certain kinds of jobs was restricted or denied, to say nothing of the federal law on the registration of aliens that had been passed by that time. The position of the immigrants was also made more complicated by artificially cultivated prejudices against aliens.

The active participation of immigrants in class conflicts prompted a reaction from the monopolies and ruling circles. The twenties and thirties saw many attempts to revive the campaign of persecution against politically "unreliable" immigrants. The campaign was aimed at deepening the cleavages in the working class along nationality lines and instilling in the minds of millions of Americans the idea that aliens were one of the main causes of their hardships. After the legal murder of Sacco and Vanzetti by the authorities, a massive drive against aliens was launched and continued into the years of the crisis. Tens of thousands of immigrants active in the labor movement were arrested and deported. In Portland, Seattle, New York and other cities, labor organizations came out in protest against this policy. And in the years that followed, the authorities continued to use the threat of deportation against foreign-born unionists. In 1938, for example, the first deportation suit was brought against Harry Bridges.<sup>1</sup>

As was the case earlier, a definite trend was observed in the geographical distribution of immigrants. They gravitated to areas where immigrant workers had concentrated over the decades. These were industrial regions with a predominance of industries which traditionally hired immigrants. Data on the concentration of foreign-born in 1940 attests to just this kind of distribution. At that time, about 9.5 million immigrants lived in the central and northeastern part of the country, while only a little over 600,000 were in the South and 1,400,000 in the West.<sup>2</sup> Within these large regions there were some areas that were densely populated by immigrants and their progeny. Among these, besides New York and the state of Pennsylvania, was the whole Great Lakes region, where in 1933 foreign-

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Madison, *American Labor Leaders. Personalities and Forces in the Labor Movement*, New York, 1950, p. 415.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1957*, p. 12.



born Americans accounted for 41.3 percent of the population, as compared with 34.4 percent in the country as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Certain ethnic groups tended to settle primarily in specific regions. Thus, Americans of Scandinavian origin concentrated in Minnesota and Wisconsin, "new" immigrants—from Poland, Russia and Italy—concentrated in large numbers in the states of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey and in the Chicago area.

The significance of ethnic distinctions gradually diminished. As the years went by most of the immigrants who had arrived in the first decades of the 20th century became assimilated. This process was further accelerated because the ethnic groups received few new members due to the cut back in immigration in the twenties and thirties. The exception was the Latin American, especially the Mexican, immigration.

The processes of assimilation affected different nationalities in varying degrees. Their intensity depended on the character of employment, location, the compactness of the settlements, religious influences, etc. Undeniably, however, the American proletariat had become more homogeneous in the twenty years between the wars. The period under consideration differed in this respect from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the working class had shown a steady increase in national heterogeneity due to massive immigration. Now, there was a waning of the national antagonisms that used to exist among immigrant workers. This and the increasing influence of the assimilation processes helped bring workers who had come from different countries closer together and facilitated their struggle for new mass organizations.

Thus, the economic development of capitalist industry itself prodded the workers toward unification into big industrial unions. Daniel De Leon, a prominent figure in the labor and Socialist movements, was an ardent promoter of industrial unionism. "...Capitalist development," he said, "on the one hand, deliberately seeks to perpetuate its obsolete craft Union shape as the strongest bulwark for the continuance of

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Warne Newell, *Chicago and the Labor Movement. Metropolitan Unionism in the 1930s*, Urbana, 1961, p. 117.

capitalism, while, on the other hand, capitalist development unintentionally and unwillingly forces the workingmen forward to reform their economic organizations upon a fit system, by itself marshaling the workers into the industrial battalions that ever more industrially organized capitalism itself furnishes the mold for...."<sup>1</sup>

Even then, in De Leon's time, progressive people were aware of the fact that the craft unions, which artificially broke up workers into small groups and groupings, were "a brake to check the downward run of the chariot of labor".<sup>2</sup>

The famous Socialist and a leader of the labor movement, Eugene V. Debs, no less brilliantly revealed the reactionary meaning of craft unionism and the progressive nature of industrial unionism. He said in one of his speeches: "Speaking for myself, I was made to realize long ago that the old trade unionism was utterly incompetent to deal successfully with the exploiting corporations in this struggle. I was made to see that in craft unionism the capitalist class have it in their power to keep the workers divided, to use one part of them with which to conquer and crush another part of them. Indeed, I was made to see that the old form of unionism separates the workers and keeps them helpless at the mercy of their masters."<sup>3</sup> Debs was sure of the ultimate victory of the new form of unionism. In 1910 he wrote to British trade union leader Tom Man: "...the triumph of industrial unionism over craft unionism is but a question of time, and this can be materially shortened if we deal sanely and wisely with the situation."<sup>4</sup>

As will be shown later, events developed precisely in that direction. True, another quarter century was needed for the prediction to come true. In the interim, the objective prerequisites necessary to prepare a truly mass movement for industrial unions continued to ripen. The time came in the mid-thirties.

<sup>1</sup> *Unity. An Address Delivered by Daniel De Leon at New Pythagoras Hall, New York, February 21, 1908*, New York, 1914, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel De Leon, *Socialist Reconstruction of Society. The Industrial Vote*, New York, 1919, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches of Eugene V. Debs, Voices of Revolt*, Vol. IX, New York, 1928, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

It would be hard to overrate the ideological and organizational influence of the progressive forces, and in particular the influence of the Communist Party of the United States, on the development of industrial unionism in the 1930s. From the very beginning of their activity, not only the American Communists but the Communist parties of other countries as well put the development of industrial unions in first place. In 1915, Lenin wrote to the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League in the U.S.: "We agree with you that we must be against craft Unionism & in favor of industrial Unionism, i.e., of big, centralized Trade Unions & in favor of the most active participation of *all* members of party in *all* economic struggles & in *all* trade union & cooperative organizations of the working class."<sup>1</sup>

The experience of the American labor movement showed that the most successful working-class actions were those carried out by industrial trade unions. In the past, there were a number of organizations which ardently promoted the principle of industrial unionism: the Industrial Workers of the World, the Trade Union Education League and the Trade Union Unity League, some A.F.L. unions such as the miners' and clothing workers' unions, and others. The efforts of progressive organizations, labor leaders and rank-and-file masses to launch a broad movement for the creation of industrial unions were always a manifestation of the democratic, progressive tendency in the labor movement of the United States.

An important stimulus to the movement for industrial unions was the working-class struggle for labor legislation, especially for liberal laws such as the Wagner Act, the Social Security Act, the law against strikebreaking and legislation on fair hiring practices. At the same time, the policy of maneuvering between rightist groupings of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat pursued by Roosevelt and his party, and their search for a liberal solution of the labor question in Congress, which became part of the New Deal, also objectively helped the movement for industrial unions. It must be emphasized, however, that the influence here was mutual.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 424.

Above all, Roosevelt's legislation was a direct result of the mass unemployed movement and the workers' strike struggle in the first half of the thirties. At the same time, the new Congress and Roosevelt's administration, taking into account the dangerous policy of their predecessors, were under the pressure of the masses to take the road of liberal concessions to the working class.

Such, then, were the most important of the preconditions for the mass movement for the creation of industrial unions in the first half of the 1930s.

The year 1935 was an important landmark in the history of U.S. labor legislation. Among the problems of domestic policy, perhaps no other was more acute and politically significant than that of labor. The United States was a great industrial power in which the working class made up the basic mass of the population. The fate of the country therefore depended in many ways on the position and conduct of the people who created the national wealth. It was not surprising that the many aspects of the labor question were in the center of the legislators' attention in the houses and committees of Congress.

They had before them the example of the Hoover administration and of the road traversed by the Republican Congress—the road of charitable "aid" meted out by philanthropists, of Congress ignoring the legitimate demands of the people, of open repression against labor organizations and suppression of the strike movement.

Roosevelt and his supporters soberly assessed the situation and felt that the former policy must be abandoned if they wanted to avoid defeat at the next elections. The Democrats understood that, having received the majority of votes in the 1932 elections, they had now to prove themselves in the eyes of the people to be a party of action.

In making this choice of direction, the power elite were prompted by an awareness of the need to avoid aggravating the class struggle. The working class was exerting pressure on the ruling upper echelons in Congress and the White House and influencing public opinion in favor of a new liberal direction.

The Wagner-Connery bill was the direct result of a fierce struggle by the workers. Its appearance in Congress was



prompted by the mass actions of the proletariat during the years of the crisis and depression. The marches of unemployed, the mass meetings and processions, resolutions and letters—all combined represented an important stage in the struggle for the Wagner Act. In the spring of 1935, William Green stated on behalf of the A.F.L. that if the Wagner bill was not passed, a new wave of mass strikes would roll across the country. Congressman Robert F. Rich of Pennsylvania, also felt that if the Wagner bill was not passed, then in the next three years there would be more strikes than in all of history.

On June 27, 1935, the Seventy Fourth Congress passed Bill No. 198 on labor relations, which became known as the Wagner Act.<sup>1</sup> On July 5, 1935, Roosevelt signed the bill into law. The National Labor Relations Act was one of the major documents defining the substance of the liberal legislation of Roosevelt's New Deal. What were the content and nature of the Wagner Act? Why did it trigger such a violent reaction on the part of the big capitalists?

Section 1 of the Act stated that employers were denying workers the right to organize and did not recognize collective agreements, and this led to strikes. Further, it noted that while workers were deprived of these rights, employers were united into employers' associations or other forms of corporations. It acknowledged that this inequality had an adverse effect on the course of interstate commerce, jeopardized business activity and lowered the wages and purchasing power of workers. Experience showed, the drafters of the law explained, that when the authorities upheld the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively, this policy freed interstate commerce from the disruptive effects of strikes and encouraged the practice of amicably settling labor disputes.

The part called Rights of Employees in Sections 7 and 8 of the Act formulated the main substance of the law. It guaranteed employees the right to self-organization, "to form unions, to bargain collectively through representatives of their

<sup>1</sup> *Compilation of Laws Relating to Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration Between Employers and Employees*, compiled by Elmer A. Lewis, Washington, 1951, pp. 297-305.

own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection". Section 8 stipulated that "it shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer—

"(1) To interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed in section 7.

"(2) To dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization or contribute financial or other support to it....

"(3) By discrimination in regard to hire or tenure of employment or any term or condition of employment to encourage or discourage membership in any labor organization....

"(4) To discharge or otherwise discriminate against an employee because he has filed charges or given testimony under this Act.

"(5) To refuse to bargain collectively with the representatives of his employees, subject to the provisions of Section 9 (a)."

Section 13 said: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed so as to interfere with or impede or diminish in any way the right to strike."<sup>1</sup>

Violations of the law were punishable by fines of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment of up to one year, or both. A three-member National Labor Relations Board was set up and designated by the Act as the federal organ for regulating labor relations.

The Wagner Act was indeed a liberal law, opening up to trade unions and workers new legal possibilities for struggle with the monopolies within the framework of the existing capitalist system. The law did not contradict the economic system or the political regime. On the contrary, it discharged the atmosphere of discontent among the workers who were pouring into newly created industrial unions with the aim of winning the right to bargain collectively. One cannot but agree with John L. Lewis when he said that the labor movement achieved more under Roosevelt than under any other president in U.S. history. The trade unions were guaranteed the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 300-01, 305.

right to strike, to bargain collectively, to call employers to account for interfering in the life of labor organizations and for violations of the elementary rights of workers. The National Labor Relations Board examined complaints by the unions and employees concerning violations of the law. It investigated the causes of disputes and in most cases decided in favor of the labor unions, since in many instances the monopolies in fact ignored or failed to comply with the provisions of the law.

New Deal labor legislation included more than the Wagner Act alone. A number of other liberal laws followed.

The struggle of the workers for social security induced Congress and administration also to pass Bill No. 271 on social security. The 74th Congress took this important step on August 14, 1935. There had been no federal social security or unemployment insurance law prior to that. The study of the problem of insuring the unemployed and the aged was begun soon after President Roosevelt assumed office. The Social Security Act of 1935 provided for a system of federal old-age benefits, federal financial aid to the states to help them provide assistance to the blind, dependent children and mothers, crippled children, and the unemployed.

The law provided for three kinds of aid. The first was the system of old-age benefits. A special fund was set up for this purpose, to be financed by a payroll tax levied on both employees and employers. The tax went into effect December 31, 1936. The tax rate was set at 1 percent of the employees' wages for the first three years (1937-1939 inclusive), with a subsequent increase of 0.5 percent to be made every three years until in 1949 a total tax of 6 percent (3 percent by employees and 3 percent by employers) would be in effect. This old-age insurance system came within the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Section 1 of the law stipulated that the states would receive allocations for assistance to the aged during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1936, for which \$49,750,000 were set aside. New sums earmarked for paying old-age benefits would be appropriated every subsequent year. Workers would be qualified to receive the benefits at age 65 or more; moreover, a residence requirement was also established — not less than five

years' residence in a given state. The size of the benefits could not exceed thirty dollars a month per person.

Another kind of assistance was unemployment insurance. The provisions of Sections 3 and 9 were designed to stimulate the adoption of unemployment insurance laws in the states. By the beginning of October 1937, such laws had been passed in all 48 states. The Social Security Act provided for a federal tax to be levied on all employers who had eight or more employees, with certain types of employment excepted. The tax did not apply to those who paid wages for the following services: agricultural labor, domestic service; shipping on the waters of the United States; federal, state and local government service; and employment by certain non-profit religious, charitable and educational organizations. The tax rate was set at 1 percent of wages in 1936, 2 percent in 1937, and 3 percent thereafter. In February 1936, six months after the President signed the law, Congress approved the first appropriations for unemployment benefits. Actually, the payment of benefits began only in January 1938, and then only in 22 states.<sup>1</sup>

According to Department of Treasury data, the unemployment insurance fund was \$227 million as of April 30, 1937, and \$764 million as of April 30, 1938. The size of the benefit as a rule did not exceed one half of the worker's wage. Moreover, the maximum benefit was \$15 a week, and it was paid for 16 weeks.

The third category of assistance was that given to the blind, and orphaned and crippled children who were dependents of close relatives or guardians. In May 1938, 602,000 dependent children, mothers and other close relatives received \$31.30 per month per family, and 39,000 blind received about \$23 a month per person. The fund for assistance to children was \$37 million in May 1937 and about \$79 million in May 1938.<sup>2</sup> According to Department of Treasury data, all three kinds of assistance in May 1938 extended to 2,300,000 adults and children, who received one or another kind of benefit under the provisions of the Social Security Act.

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record (CR)*, May 31, 1938, Appendix, pp. 10274-10275.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10275.



A Federal Administration on Social Insurance was established under the Act, and it organized 318 departments in the states. Besides these, each state had its own social security department with branches in the countries. The Federal Administration, appointed by the President and approved by the Senate, was composed of Chairman John Winent and members Arthur Altmeyer and Vincent Miles.

The Social Security Act was a serious gain of the working class. It was the beginning of a social insurance system which the ruling class and the government could not go back on because the trade unions and broad segments of society fought unremittingly to preserve and further develop it.

Among the other laws passed by the 74th Congress which ranked among the liberal measures of Roosevelt's New Deal was Act No. 776 prohibiting strikebreaking. The right of workers and trade unions to strike, it will be remembered, was guaranteed by the Wagner Act. The law against strikebreaking was signed by the President on June 24, 1936. It said, with regard to the hiring of strikebreakers: "...Any person with intent to employ such person to obstruct or interfere, in any manner, with the right of peaceful picketing during any labor controversy affecting wages, hours, or conditions of labor, or the right of organization for the purpose of collective bargaining, shall be deemed guilty of a felony and shall be punishable by a fine not exceeding \$5,000, or by imprisonment not exceeding two years, or both, in the discretion of the court."<sup>1</sup>

In August 1937, Congress passed, and on September 2, the President signed, a federal housing act that became known as the Wagner-Steagall Act. The law authorized expenditures totalling \$526,000,000 to improve housing conditions for low-income families.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the bourgeois character of the Wagner Act, it was violently opposed in the business community. Although only a minority in Congress opposed it, there were many outside the walls of Capitol who bitterly condemned Roosevelt's liberal policies. The American Liberty League came out against the

<sup>1</sup> *Compilation of Laws...*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Arsenal of Facts*, New York, 1938, p. 60.

Wagner Act long before it was passed. At about the same time Alfred Rives, vice-president of the Automobile Industry Association, declared at a meeting that the Wagner Bill would impose the closed shop on the industry and automatically provide the right for a job to the man with a union card. Henry Hariman, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told the Senate Committee on education and labor that the Wagner Bill provided for labor rule which threatened to supplant all existing relevant bodies.

On September 5, 1935, after the Wagner Act was signed into law, the American Liberty League published a report declaring that the Act was unconstitutional and represented unreasonable interference in the affairs of industry. Donald Richberg, a well-known monopoly lawyer, gave a general assessment of the Wagner Act. In his book, *Labor Union Monopoly*, he wrote that Roosevelt and the Democratic leadership gave great impetus to trade union expansion and that, in particular, the Wagner Act granted privileges only to workers and labor unions but not to employers. In Richberg's words, that law worked "to help organized labor turn collective bargaining into collective coercion and assume a dominant role in industry".<sup>1</sup> The Wagner Act, he alleged, was already fraught with the danger of what he termed "labor union monopoly".

On August 23, 1935, the President formed the National Labor Relations Board, consisting of T. Warren Madden (chairman), Donald W. Smith and Edwin S. Smith. The N.L.R.B. immediately ran up against monopoly sabotage of the law. Ford and General Motors, the steel corporations of the Little Steel group, a number of electrical and radio firms and many others refused to comply with the Wagner Act and the N.L.R.B. rulings. As N.L.R.B. chairman T. Warren Madden stated in a radio address, for three years the Board had to face the bitter opposition of employers, their agents and a hostile press. From the end of 1935 to June 1, 1936, the Board received 21,933 complaints about violations of the Wagner Act, affecting the interests of over 5,045,000 workers.<sup>2</sup> No less hostile sentiments also existed in Congress.

<sup>1</sup> Donald R. Richberg, *Labor Union Monopoly. A Clear and Present Danger*, Chicago, 1957, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Trade Union Facts*, New York, 1939, p. 59.

Drawing attention to the mass character of the violations, Congressman Robert Ramspeck of Georgia said in the House of Representatives on November 17, 1937: "It is well known that a great many employers in this country, despite the upholding of the Wagner Labor Relations Act by the Supreme Court, have refused to make any effort to make that act effective."<sup>1</sup>

In 1936, and 1937, the labor unions voiced their protest against the systematic violations, demanding radical measures to halt the sabotage of N.L.R.B. rulings.

The defenders of liberal legislation had constantly to fight off frenzied attacks by extremist elements in Congress in 1937 and 1938. A hard core of anti-labor opposition was formed, composed of Senators Arthur Vandenberg, Robert Taft, Harry Truman, Pat Harrison, Hiram Johnson, and Representatives Clare Hoffman, Harry Sheppard, E. E. Cox, Everett Dirksen, Martin Dies, Joseph W. Byrns, Jr., and John Rankin. It was a rare day in the houses of Congress that their hysterical voices were not heard crying about the "Red menace" or about conspirators trying to kindle the fire of "civil war".

In 1937, the sabotage continued unabated. The constitutionality of the Act was questioned, and its opponents waged a fierce campaign to repeal or amend it. They hoped that the Supreme Court would take their side and declare the law unconstitutional. However, they miscalculated. On April 12, 1937, the Supreme Court by majority vote found the National Labor Relations Act to be in accord with the spirit and letter of the U.S. Constitution.

In response to the continued efforts of the monopolies to sabotage the Wagner Act and to undermine the work of the N.L.R.B., Senator Robert Wagner introduced a bill in February 1938 (as an amendment to the Walsh-Healey Act), under which monopolies that violated the labor legislation would be ineligible for government contracts. The House Appropriations Committee rejected the bill. John L. Lewis voiced protest against the sabotage of the Wagner Act by its opponents in Congress, pointing out that organized labor had the right to know the attitude of congressmen toward the bill.

Such was the line taken in 1937 and 1938 by the extremist

<sup>1</sup> *CR*, Vol. 82, No. 3, November 17, 1937, p. 147.

elements in Congress with respect to the Wagner Act. Assessing their position, Representative Samuel Dickstein (New York) stressed at one point that it was in Congress that "we have an atmosphere of hysteria against organized labor, an atmosphere that I regret to note has swept Congress to the point of seriously considering passage of bills that would destroy labor's right to organize, would destroy labor's right to bargain collectively, would destroy labor's right to strike".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, threats were being hurled in Congress at the trade unions, at the Communist Party and the Senate Civil Liberties Committee headed by Senator Robert La Follette, Jr. President Roosevelt and his administration were subjected to constant attacks.

However, the balance of forces in Congress was clearly in favor of the New Deal and liberal legislation. In the final count, the majority expressed itself in favor of the Wagner Act.

The Wagner Act was won by the workers in their struggle against the grave consequences of the economic crisis, in their fight for the right to organize, for bread and jobs. It spurred them to use the legal possibilities available under bourgeois democracy within the framework of the capitalist system. The law was not a gift from magnanimous employers and politicians of the bourgeois state. The workers saw it as a matter of upholding their elementary rights, which they won through resolute and organized actions. This major result lent them strength and militancy for the subsequent struggle. Having become an inexorable necessity of the time and circumstances, the law in turn stimulated a dramatic growth in trade union membership and an upsurge of the strike movement in the second half of the thirties. Thus, the Wagner Act did not justify many of the hopes that the ruling circles had pinned on it, for many politicians had hoped that getting such a liberal law passed would serve to weaken the strike movement.

As far as most employers were concerned, the Wagner Act was unacceptable because it helped the growth of trade unions and strengthened their positions in the fight for collective agreements, higher wages and better working conditions.

<sup>1</sup> *CR*, Vol. 87, Part 3, March 19, 1941, to May 1, 1941, p. 3473.



Opposition to the Act arose in both of the bourgeois political parties, but primarily in the Republican Party, which during the years of the crisis had shown itself to be incapable of taking a flexible approach to the labor question and held fast to old conservative methods of government. Unlike the Republicans, the Democratic Party chose the road of bourgeois reforms, by which it hoped to enhance its influence and strengthen its positions in the working class. And it succeeded in doing this not only in the economic but also in the political sphere. The labor legislation, in particular, was what accounted for the many successes of the Democratic Party in the ensuing years. Making wide use of the Wagner Act, the Democrats in Congress and the administration enlisted the support of the working masses in the next elections. Thanks to the 1935 Act, Roosevelt gained popularity among the masses of working people, which facilitated his winning again and again in the subsequent presidential elections.

The labor movement in the United States entered a new phase in 1935. The struggle for industrial organization became particularly acute, as could be seen at the 55th A.F.L. convention in October 1935 in Atlantic City, N.J. This convention turned into an arena of clashes between supporters and opponents of industrial unions. Twenty-one draft resolutions on industrial unionism were submitted to the resolutions committee. Nine of them advocated this form of labor organization and called for the formation of such unions within the Federation. The Communist faction at the convention followed the same line. For a while, the Communists succeeded in marching in step with the Socialist delegates. The position of both parties on this question coincided with the views of an impressive group of labor leaders who headed a number of A.F.L. industrial unions. One of the most influential leaders in this group was the president of the United Mine Workers' Union and 11th vice-president of the A.F.L., John L. Lewis.

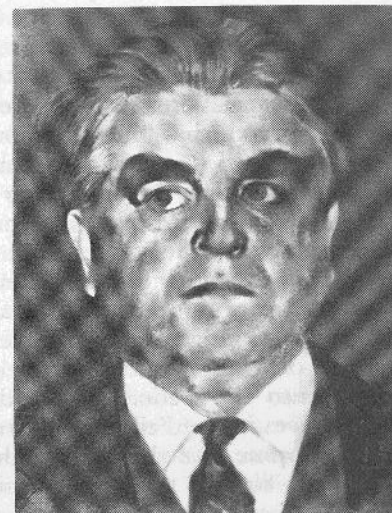
Earlier, in July 1935, in a discussion with his assistants on the U.M.W.U. executive committee, Lewis had described the sentiments of the mass of workers who wanted to organize themselves into trade unions. He laid special emphasis on the resolve of the steel workers to have their own union. Murray,

Brophy, Louck, Warrem and Edmundson, who were present at the time, supported Lewis' proposal to help this growing movement. They all agreed that such a movement and the participation of the miners in it could be realized only on the industrial principle.

At the 55th A.F.L. convention, Lewis came forward with a proposal to launch a drive to organize unorganized workers. Again (as at the previous convention) he called on the leadership of the Federation to begin the offensive. He argued that the idea of creating industrial unions was not new or revolutionary. He reminded the convention of the A.F.L. Scranton Declaration of 1901, which sanctioned the industrial principle in certain cases, particularly in the coal industry. He also cited a public admission concerning the progressive character of such a labor union structure which Green had made in 1917, before he became president of the A.F.I. Lewis was backed by his supporters, Hillman, Dubinsky, Howard, and others. "But the A.F.L. patriarchs," wrote J.A. Wechsler in a book about Lewis, "complacently fondled their gold watches and paid heed instead to the executive council's report—full of lame excuses and pious promises".<sup>1</sup>

Some of them were more forthright in rejecting Lewis' proposal. For example, Daniel Tobin, the well-known leader of the teamsters union, called it sheer fantasy.

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Wechsler, *Labor Baron. A Portrait of John L. Lewis*, New York, 1944, p. 50.



14. John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers' Union from 1920, and President of the C.I.O. from 1938 to 1940

The resolutions committee rejected Lewis' resolution by a vote of 8 to 6. After that, the minority group of delegates instructed Charles Howard to present their report and resolution. Thus, during the battle of opinions, two directions took shape both in the resolutions committee and on the floor of the convention: the majority of the delegates, headed by Green, were supporters of craft unionism, and the minority enthusiastically fought for industrial organization. Commenting on the relationships that developed at the convention, Wechsler wrote that "here, obviously, was a collision between the irresistible force and the immovable body".<sup>1</sup>

Historian Walter Galenson later made a thorough analysis of the crisis in the A.F.L. and the emergence of the C.I.O. In his view, the essence of the movement which resulted in the creation of a new trade union center, amounted to disagreements of an organizational character.<sup>2</sup> There is no question that issues relating to the A.F.L. constitution, the reluctance of the top officials headed by Green to allow mass industrial unions into the Federation, and their fear of losing their prerogatives in the Federation were of no small importance in the development of the crisis in the A.F.L. However, it would be wrong to say that disagreements of an organizational character were the only cause of the split.

Another factor that must be taken into account is the attitude of the Federation's leaders to the problem of the further development of the American labor movement. This problem was becoming increasingly political in character, since the progressive forces of the movement for industrial unions advanced a whole program of struggle to put the labor movement onto a road of development independent of the bourgeoisie. The left democratic elements demanded that an end be put to the dominance of the bureaucratic leaders who stood on a platform of "pure trade unionism" and upheld the Gompersite principles in the labor movement. It is this essential feature of the internal crisis that Galenson side-steps in his work.

It should be underlined that the dispute over industrial

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> See, Walter Galenson, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

unionism at the 55th A.F.L. convention went much deeper than merely disagreement concerning the principles of unification and structure. A series of other important questions arose in the course of the debate. Would the labor movement go in the direction of democracy and progress, or would it mark time on the old, conservative positions the A.F.L. craft unions were vegetating on? What would be the attitude of this movement to the bourgeois political parties? Would it continue to be dependent upon the bourgeoisie, its state and other political institutions, or would it follow the road of freeing itself from the influence of the bourgeois ideology and creating its own political parties? Would the new industrial unions together with the craft organizations within the A.F.L. be capable of repulsing capital's offensive on the working class? Would they be able to deal a blow to the reactionary forces rising in the country and check the tendencies of the extreme reactionary elements toward fascism and support of Hitler Germany?

The minority report pointed to the altered conditions in industry and to the numerical growth of workers and their heightened role in the production process. It noted that after 55 years of activity and effort, only about 3.5 million of the 39 million workers in the country were organized under the A.F.L. banner, and that the time had come to demand an A.F.L. organizational policy that would meet present needs. In the large mass-production industries, industrial organization was the only solution. The report stressed that the A.F.L. should recognize the right of workers to organize into industrial unions and to receive free charters that would guarantee the right of all workers employed in industry to join unions.

The minority delegates came forward boldly with these demands against the stagnant traditions of the reactionary A.F.L. leadership, headed by Green and Co. The minority group was backed by a sizable number of delegates who represented the large memberships of the trade unions they headed. A heated debate raged over the reports of the two sides in the conflict. The voting on this question in many ways made a split of the A.F.L. inevitable. It went 10,933 for and 18,024 against adopting the minority report.



Ever since the 54th A.F.L. convention, Green's office had been receiving many letters and trade union resolutions urging that masses of workers be given free access to the industrial unions existing within the A.F.L. The substance of these letters and the replies to them by the president of the A.F.L. showed that the sentiments at the lower levels were opposite to those prevailing in the top echelon of the Federation. On the one hand, there was a genuine urge for a broader movement to create new trade unions, and on the other—inertness and promises. In an effort to surmount the sabotage being carried out by the Federation's leaders some unions proposed working together with others in a drive to organize unorganized workers into new unions.

There was no unity of goal or action in the growing movement for industrial unions. The top leaders of the large A.F.L. industrial unions, headed by John L. Lewis, maintained that capitalism and its economic and political framework had to remain the unchangeable sphere of operation for the labor movement in general, and the industrial unions, in particular. As before, trade unions had to adhere to Gompersism as the main means of keeping the working class ideologically subordinated to the monopolists. According to the views of these leaders, workers, regardless of the form and principles of their unification, above all had to remain within confines of economic struggle for higher wages, better working conditions, safety, shorter hours and higher standard of living. Politically, their movement should develop under the conditions of the capitalist society. Bourgeois democracy, the promotion of Americanism and the American way of life marked the border line the American labor movement was not supposed to trespass. Labor leaders were supposed to augment their arsenal of ideological weapons by the tested means of educating workers to stay within the framework of pure trade unionism, to stay out of politics, to reward friends and punish enemies. This was ideological armor of the Gompersites in the A.F.L.

On the side of the many A.F.L. labor leaders who had gone through the old school of Gompersism were the industrial and financial monopolies, the state, and a great many bourgeois institutions and reactionary organizations.

Not the smallest role in the political struggle over which way the labor movement would develop was played by the Church. The Catholic Church, a centralized organization with a powerful apparatus and, moreover, a good deal of experience in social demagoguery, enjoyed considerable influence among the workers and their organizations in the 1930s.

Instrumental in strengthening the political positions of the Catholic Church in the United States were the social principles of Catholicism, which were in perfect harmony with the interests and goals of the American bourgeoisie. Always calling itself a "friend of labor", the U.S. Catholic Church strove to turn the labor movement away from a revolutionary road and put it under the control of the bourgeois state. It got great practical assistance in this effort from the Vatican.

In 1936, Cardinal Pacelli, who three years later became Pope Pius XII, visited the United States. In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington he stressed the special importance of close cooperation between the clergy and the trade union leadership. Both sides should be given their due: they succeeded in carrying out their general line. Much was done in this direction both by the Church and the trade union hierarchy. After listening to Pacelli's speech, John Brophy remarked that he was amazed at the Cardinal's knowledge of American affairs and especially those of the labor movement.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church based its activity in the labor movement on the ideas of Pope Leo XIII and his successors, whose encyclicals were widely circulated in the United States. The encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) on the rights and duties of employers and workers, acquired special fame. This extensive treatise set forth the substance of 64 principles that the Christian worker should adhere to. The encyclical spoke with alarm about the danger of revolution, the spirit of which was invading all areas of human life. To prevent this danger, it deemed it necessary to define the relative rights and mutual responsibilities of the rich and the poor, representing capital and labor. The right to private property was declared as the natural right of man, and it was proclaimed that the

<sup>1</sup> CIO News, March 6, 1939.

Church upheld the ideal of harmonious agreement between capital and labor.<sup>1</sup>

Other documents of this sort well known in the United States were the encyclicals of Pius XI devoted to social reconstruction (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931) and the problems of struggle with communism (*Divini Redemptoris*, 1937). In the encyclical on "Atheistic Communism" (*Divini Redemptoris*), Pius XI, like Leo XIII, warned the world of the revolution, threatening it.

Section 1 of *Divini Redemptoris* said that the Catholic Church could not remain silent in the face of a "communist menace". Pius XI declared communism to be satanic punishment and a fatal calamity, afflicting the very essence of human society. Rejecting the class antagonism of bourgeois society, Catholic ideologists declared that capital and labor must be regarded not as antagonistic elements, but as sides acting in concord, in a social unity called the state.

The Catholic and Protestant churches waged a continuous and obstinate struggle for influence over the workers. Actively operating on the eve of World War II were such church organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the International Council of Religious Education, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the Methodist Federation for Social Services, the Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action, the Church League for Industrial Democracy, the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice, and many others. Ministers carried on extensive propaganda activity among workers, religious in form but bourgeois in essence. They sought to instill in workers the philosophy of humility and class collaboration.

With this aim, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists was created in 1937 at the initiative of the Catholic Church and with the blessings of the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Hayes. Everywhere it could, the Vatican strove to create Catholic trade unions that would be under the direct influence of the Church. This was possible in the countries where Catholicism was the dominant religion. In the United States, however, Protestantism prevailed and held the leading positions in church propaganda among the people. Under these

<sup>1</sup> *The Church Speaks to Modern World. The Social Teachings of Leo XIII*, ed. by E. Gilson, New York, 1935, pp. 202-04.

circumstances, the Catholic Church was unable to create purely Catholic trade unions. It was forced to struggle for influence over the workers, everywhere running into the resistance of the Protestants.

The emergence of mass industrial trade unions changed the situation radically. Here, tens and hundreds of thousands of Americans of different nationalities and religions belonged to the same labor organization. The Vatican and the American Catholic hierarchy had to reckon with this fact. In the second half of the 1930s, they allowed Catholic workers to join "neutral" trade unions, that is, unions led by non-Catholics, on the condition that they would have their own associations within them. One such association was the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Under the guidance of the Catholic Church, it spread the Catholic social teaching in the trade unions in general and in the new industrial organizations in particular. The Association published its own newspapers in a number of states, such as the *Wage Earner* in Michigan, and *Labor Leader* in New York.

Before long, the Association gained considerable influence among workers in the large trade unions through Catholic union officials. "Not the least of the signs of Catholic religious strength is to be found in the American trade union movement," wrote Foster. "The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in this country, with its Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, is boldly trying to capture the unions."<sup>1</sup> Organizationally, this church association adapted its structure to the conditions in the trade unions. The supreme council of the Association drew up a number of charter propositions.

The charter of the Association was approved on July 15, 1938, in Detroit. It stated that the purpose of the Association was to promote the development of trade unionism in the direction of Christian principles so that the labor movement could be effective in creating a Christian social order as outlined in the papal encyclicals.

The charter formulated the main tasks of Catholics in the trade unions very flexibly. The Catholic Church took into

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Twilight of World Capitalism*, New York, 1949, p. 97.



account the major factors that stimulated the mass movement for industrial organizations. It did not reject the principles of industrial unionism; it recognized and supported them. The charter declared that the Association would promote the progress of trade unionism in the interests of all working people, help labor unions in their just demands, and constantly adhere to the principle that the organization of labor and the support of trade unions are the physical and spiritual work of grace.

The charter stressed the need to spread the Catholic doctrines in the trade unions in accord with the spirit and principles of American democracy, the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. It outlined the rights and responsibilities of workers in the unions. Among their rights were: job security, a decent income, collective bargaining, participation in profits, a moderate work day, decent working conditions, the right to strike and picket. As far as responsibilities were concerned, among them the following were named: respect for property rights, reasonable cooperation with employers with the aim of settling all disputes peacefully.

As we can see, many of these propositions were drawn from the papal encyclicals, which preached "class cooperation". The *Michigan Labor Leader*, the newspaper of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, declared that the Association was not a political organization and did not engage in party politics. In fact, however, the tasks of the Association were of a strictly class nature, as indicated by its demand that Communists be expelled from the trade unions.

The activity of the Protestant churches during those years was no less vigorous. In a declaration on the social ideals of the church, issued by the Federal Council of Churches in 1932, American Protestantism reaffirmed its desire to make every effort to protect the bourgeois society. The Council included as a mandatory point in its social activity the participation of the Protestant Church in the labor movement so that it could spread the idea of repudiation of the class struggle.

Like the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches watched closely the development of the movement for industrial unions. They supported the movement, hoping to impart to it a peaceful Christian character and trying in every way to keep

it from moving in a radical direction. They supported the Wagner Act and other liberal legislation. But as soon as things began to stir to any extent, the hierarchy of the Protestant churches rose up against those who, in its opinion, were directing or trying to direct the labor movement toward more resolute struggle against the monopolies and the abuses of the capitalist system.

The Protestant church leaders did not by any means encourage liberalism in their clergymen. Even so, there were many among the latter who sincerely took the side of the workers in their struggle against the oppression of the monopolies. However, they always met with resistance from the upper churchmen and were often victimized. Such, in general, was the position taken by the American churches on the development of the labor movement.

Leftist democratic leaders advocated a different line of development for the labor movement. They, too, supported the above-mentioned economic demands, but at the same time they told the workers about the dangers of the Gompersite policy. The leftists focussed their position on uncompromising struggle against the big monopolies. The workers should create militant industrial unions and turn them into fortresses for an offensive against big capital. Their weapons of struggle should include such things as the general strike, political demonstrations, the creation of a labor party, and the nomination of labor candidates. The leftists proposed to explain to the people, through a broad program of education and agitation, the tasks of the proletariat in its struggle against the dominance of the monopolies.

The Communist Party, for example, worked for agreement on trade union unity between independent organizations and the A.F.L. This raised the question of what should be the fate of the Trade Union Unity League, which despite a series of successes, never became a mass association. In January 1935, a Central Committee Plenum recommended that the T.U.U.L. unions and branches should attempt to join the A.F.L. unions as organized units, without weakening their mass work.<sup>1</sup> In cases where they could not join collectively, the members of the

<sup>1</sup> *Communist*, February 1935, p. 119.

leftist trade unions were advised to join A.F.L. unions individually. At a T.U.U.L. convention held in New York on March 17, 1935, this federation of left-wing industrial unions passed a resolution to join the A.F.L. and cease its activity as an independent organization.

The Party was against the idea of forming a new working-class association, feeling that the immediate task of the Communists was to work within the A.F.L. However, events were fast moving along the road of setting up a new trade union center, independent of the A.F.L.

While the time for this had not come in the 1920s, the labor movement was on the threshold of such a situation in 1935. This meant that the Communist Party was about to face serious tests. The reactionary forces in the A.F.L. continued to intensify their struggle against it.

The A.F.L. leaders were zealous in their anti-Communist and splitting activity. At the 55th convention, for example, they tried to push through an amendment to the A.F.L. constitution prohibiting Communists from holding official posts in the labor unions. The proposed amendment said that anybody violating that section of the constitution would be subject to the penalty of suspension from the A.F.L.<sup>1</sup> Although the amendment was not passed, attacks against the leftists and Communists did not cease. The men at the helm of the A.F.L. remained hostile to the new movements, trying to thwart the attempts of the leftists to break with craft unionism and embark upon the road of organizing unorganized workers on a broad scale.

The above facts concerning the attitude of various social forces to the conflict within the A.F.L. indicate that differences of an organizational character were not the main reason for the split of the A.F.L.

Due credit should be given not only to the Communist and left-wing figures who actively supported industrial unions, but also to the influential group of leaders of A.F.L. industrial unions. This group began a vigorous struggle against Green, Woll, Harrison and others, to turn the A.F.L. into a mass association of industrial unions. The time came when John L. Lewis stepped up his activity in the leadership of the

<sup>1</sup> *Communist*, November 1935, p. 1027.

Federation, seizing the initiative. At that moment, he and his closest friends, who also led large industrial unions, ventured upon a very bold move.

On November 10, 1935, the leaders of the minority, representing eight big A.F.L. unions with an aggregate of one million members, or one-third of the Federation's strength, gathered at the headquarters of the United Mine Workers' Union in Washington for an unofficial meeting. The unions represented there were: United Mine Workers—John L. Lewis; International Typographical Union—Charles P. Howard; Amalgamated Clothing Workers—Sidney Hillman; the International Ladies Garment Workers—David Dubinsky; United Textile Workers—Thomas F. McMahon; Oil Fields, Gas Well and Refinery Workers—Harvey Fremming; United Hatters of America—Max Zaritsky; and Mining and Smelting Workers—Thomas Brown.

The leaders decided at that meeting to form within the A.F.L. a Committee for Industrial Organization (C.I.O.). A statement issued by the eight unions said that the C.I.O. would work in accordance with the principles and policies enunciated by these organizations at the A.F.L. convention in Atlantic City. The purpose of the Committee, the statement said, was to work as an educational group within the A.F.L. to promote industrial unionism. The C.I.O. would cooperate in the struggle for trade union recognition and collective bargaining. All other organizations interested in the success of the new movement would be invited to participate in the work of the Committee. John L. Lewis was elected chairman, Charles Howard, secretary, and John Brophy, director.

The union leaders headed by Lewis made an important step when they defied the strong and influential Green group and created the Committee. All eight members of the Committee were the heads of big unions and had large sums of money and press organs at their disposal. In January 1937, William Foster wrote that "John L. Lewis and other C.I.O. leaders, although having a very conservative background, have shown a real spirit of progress in the development of the C.I.O. movement. Their progressive advance was most extraordinary among A.F.L. trade union leadership. And to accomplish the historic tasks of the great forward development of which they stand



at the head, new test will be made of their responsiveness to the masses' needs.... They have in their hands the opportunity to do a most fundamental service to the working class, not only of America, but of the whole world".<sup>1</sup>

Thus, from the very emergence of mass industrial labor unions, the movement was headed by Lewis, Hillman, Murray and other labor leaders, all of whom had developed ideologically in the preceding decades and continued to maintain their devotion to the capitalist system. Nonetheless, this did not prevent their breaking with Gompers' successor, Green, and his associates. Declaring war on Green, Woll and other A.F.L. leaders, Lewis, Hillman, Murray and their supporters thereby took the lead of the broad mass movement, exerting a positive influence on its development. As a result of their bold and firm line, a split came about in the top bureaucracy of the A.F.L. Lewis used his personal experience as an organizer and his position as president of the miners' union in the interests of the forces who wanted to organize unskilled workers into trade unions. However, the movement was so massive that none other than the workers themselves rose to overcome the obstacles standing before them.

Two decisive factors determined the prospects of the movement. First, the mass influx of workers into the new unions. Second, the existence of a group of labor leaders who had decided to break with the old, customary ties with a conservative leadership that stubbornly held to the principles of craft unionism. Both these factors coincided in time, and created the conditions for the victory of the new movement. Each by itself would have been unable to ensure the success of the struggle.

In the preceding decades, the history of the American labor movement saw many instances where the activity of the working masses was suppressed rather than reinforced by A.F.L. leaders. Breaking with this Gompersite line, the heads of the industrial unions, on the contrary, promoted the movement of the unorganized masses of workers who were straining to join new labor unions. The Lewis group understood the demands and spirit of the times, and during that

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *What Means a Strike in Steel*, New York, 1937, p. 63.

period led the broad masses of workers accordingly. To be sure, their progressiveness had limits, remaining as it did within the procrustean framework of capitalism. This feature was the point of departure in the political credo of these labor leaders. More than ever before, the broad worker masses felt their collective power and solidarity in the struggle against the big monopolies. This undermined the backward approach to the building of trade unions along craft lines which the followers of Gompers usually clung to. Henceforth, there was increasing rejection of the notion that highly skilled workers had an exclusive right to organize, which was also one of the principles of Gompersism. Trade unions turned into mass organizations, became fundamentally altered and introduced the spirit of democracy into the labor movement.

During those years, the Communist Party's role and influence among the working masses increased. It worked for the unity and integrity of the A.F.L. The 9th Party convention in June 1936 declared that Communists would actively support joint actions by all labor groups for a united and powerful A.F.L.<sup>1</sup> The Communists supported the initiative of Lewis and the other leaders for a massive drive to organize the unorganized. They took an active part in creating new industrial unions, and struggled against the policies of monopoly reaction. All this enhanced the prestige of the Communists in the eyes of many American workers. It was a period when the Party exerted considerable influence on developments in the labor movement. Consequently, in their day-to-day activity the labor leaders headed by Lewis could not afford to overlook the position and influence of the Communist party.

All these factors gave rise to a crisis of craft unionism in the A.F.L. Not only Green and his supporters, but also the monopoly circles and political leaders in Congress, the administration and the bourgeois parties realized that a crisis in the A.F.L. was inevitable. They could see the ranks of the Federation splitting and new labor organizations and new forms of class struggle emerging. In Congress, the Republican

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, New York, 1936, p. 25.

and Dixiecrat opposition more and more often raised a hue and cry about the "Red menace" and the "plot" of Communist elements.

The split of the A.F.L. could have been avoided were it not for the conceit and obstinacy of the supporters of craft unionism. They relied on the Federation as a fortress from which they would open fire on their opponents in the industrial trade unions. It turned out that the fortress was not as strong as its residents thought.

The C.I.O. repeatedly stated that it had been formed within the A.F.L. to broaden the social base of the Federation, to draw masses of unskilled workers into its ranks. With this aim, the C.I.O. began in 1936 to publish a newspaper, *Union News Service*, renamed *C.I.O. News* in December 1937.

Contrary to common sense, the leaders of the A.F.L. began attacking the C.I.O., charging it with dual unionism. On November 23, 1935, Green sent all eight of its constituent unions identical letters in which he assessed the C.I.O. as an organization which conflicted with the A.F.L. constitution. He stated that when within one organization another arises for the sake of achieving and carrying out certain declared aims, no one could accurately foresee where such a movement would lead. Citing his duty as president of the Federation, Green warned the members of the Committee of the serious consequences connected with the existence of such an organization within the A.F.L., namely, the danger of a split.

On that same day, as a token of protest against the line taken by the A.F.L. leadership, John L. Lewis resigned from his post as 11th vice-president of the A.F.L. The members of the C.I.O. assured Green that their organization was not in conflict with the Federation's constitution, but was pursuing the lofty aim of uniting the working masses into labor unions. On January 15, 1936, at a meeting in Miami, Florida, the A.F.L. executive council decided to form a commission composed of three A.F.L. vice-presidents—George Harrison, Joseph Weber and G. M. Bugniazed—and charge it with the task of settling the conflict on the basis of the A.F.L. constitution, which in practice could mean only the disbandment of the C.I.O.

In a collective letter to Green, the C.I.O. unions declared that the C.I.O.'s continued activity was not only fully justified,

but essential for the future growth of the American Federation of Labor.

On May 19, 1939, Harrison and his colleagues met in Washington with representatives of the C.I.O., but the meeting was unproductive. The commission thereupon issued each of the C.I.O. unions an ultimatum demanding that it sever its ties with the C.I.O.

On May 20, the Harrison commission sent all members of the C.I.O. identical letters saying that it was a violation of trade union democracy when a minority tried to impose its will on the majority. The charge was again made that the existence of their organization within the A.F.L. constituted dual unionism, which jeopardized the unity of the Federation. The letter urged the C.I.O. leaders immediately to dissolve the Committee for Industrial Organization and to recognize the A.F.L. convention as the only Federation body authorized to formulate organizational and administrative policy, and to act in accord with the fundamental policy principles of the A.F.L. The commission demanded that it be informed within a period of two weeks of a decision made in accordance with the spirit and substance of the recommendations outlined in the letter. The further actions of the executive council, the letter said, would depend on the nature of the commission's report, which in turn would be determined by the reply to the given letter.

All the unions to which this ultimatum was addressed rejected it. In a letter to Harrison, dated May 28, McMahon, the president of the textile workers' union, said that the A.F.L. constitution permitted A.F.L. members to exercise the right to engage in educational work among unorganized workers and that this kind of activity by his trade union was in keeping with the goals and tasks of the Federation. The secretary-treasurer of the Miners and Smelters Union, John Sherwood, concluded his letter to Harrison, dated June 2, with a statement that in view of the facts listed, the union absolutely could not agree with the demands made in the letter of May 20 regarding the necessity of breaking off relations with the Committee for Industrial Organization, and that the position of the union on this question remained unchanged. That same day, the president of the clothing workers' union, Sidney Hillman, on behalf of the executive committee of his union, voiced



complete disagreement with the Harrison commission's statement to the effect that their organization, which had associated itself with the Committee, was obliged to comply with the constitution and rules of the A.F.L.

These were not the only labor leaders that sent a negative reply to the A.F.L. executive council's commission. Green's office was flooded with letters, telegrams and resolutions condemning his action. Workers and local unions came out in defense of the C.I.O. and showed concern over the outcome of the sharpened conflict. In his reply to letters condemning his splitting position, Green related the conflict with the C.I.O. not to the question of the destinies of the labor movement, but to the insubordination of a minority to the majority.

As days and months passed, it became clear that the position of the Harrison commission was a pitiful farce. At the same time, the influence of the C.I.O. continued to grow. Following the electrical workers' union, on June 3 the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers joined it.

The A.F.L. leadership became increasingly nervous. In June, the executive council demanded that the unions explain the reasons for ignoring the Harrison commission's ultimatum. After a two-month investigation, the council declared the C.I.O. and its member-unions a parallel organization within the A.F.L., in violation of its constitution. Charges of dual unionism were made against the Committee at a meeting of the executive council in Washington on August 3 in a report by the head of the A.F.L. metal workers' department, John F. Frey. He had assiduously gathered the kind of material as would supposedly prove the C.I.O. guilty of subversive activity within the Federation. In fact, back on July 15, he had already presented these well-known and worn-out charges against the C.I.O. and its twelve leaders in a report to the executive council. Now, after two days of deliberation, in which the C.I.O. unions refused to participate, the A.F.L. executive council on August 5, 1936, adopted a resolution which made the same accusations of dualism against the industrial unions and announced their expulsion from the A.F.L.

The executive council demanded in its decision that every union then affiliated with the C.I.O. withdraw from the Committee, sever all contacts with it and announce the

withdrawal indicating in this way the choice it had made between the A.F.L. and the C.I.O. Any C.I.O.-affiliated union that failed to do so by September 5, 1936, was to be automatically expelled from the American Federation of Labor, thereby losing all privileges associated with its membership in the A.F.L.

All of the C.I.O. unions decisively rejected the executive council's ultimatum. They not only did not break off relations with the Committee, but took an even firmer position with regard to the line of the A.F.L. leaders.

Thereby, the rightist leaders of the A.F.L. brought the Federation right up to the next splitting action. At the meeting of the executive council on September 15, they expelled, with the reservation "temporarily", from the Federation the mine workers', ladies garment workers', oil workers', textile workers', glass blowers', auto workers', and the mine, mill and smelter workers' unions. With regard to the typographical workers' and hatters' unions, although the executive council considered them member-unions of the C.I.O., nonetheless it decided that in practice they were not connected with the Committee, and on this basis deemed it unnecessary to apply the same measure to them.

In taking the decision to "temporarily" expel the above-named organizations, the leadership of the Federation obviously felt that the leaders of those unions would change their minds and come to the executive council, admitting the error of their ways. However, these hopes were not justified. On the contrary, the plans to abolish the Committee could only evoke the resistance of broad worker masses. The position taken by the A.F.L. leaders only helped speed the decision of some large international unions to join the C.I.O. Thus, at meetings between November 6 and 8, 1936, the Committee accepted into its ranks 90,000 members of unions in the electric, radio and shipbuilding industries. This was a big success for the C.I.O.

At the 56th A.F.L. convention, held on November 16, 1936, in Tampa, Florida, the splitters carried out their threat: the representatives of the expelled unions were not even admitted to the convention. In their absence, the convention approved by a vote of 21,679 to 2,043 the executive council's decision to

expel all trade unions associated with the Committee. The split of the A.F.L., the only labor federation in existence at that time, became a fact.

When they learned about this latest move by the leadership of the Federation, many local national and international unions raised their voices in protest against the undemocratic actions of Green and his entourage. An avalanche of letters from A.F.L. unions and their locals hit Green's office, denouncing the splitting line of the executive council.

Thus, the crisis of the Federation manifested itself not only in the political struggle and the deepening cleavage inside the A.F.L. These processes were a consequence of more influential factors which predetermined the conduct of both sides in the labor movement and affected the policies and tactics of the bourgeoisie, thus going far beyond the bounds of the labor movement. The developments in the labor movement were also influenced by certain events taking place at the time which involved broad sections of the American people.

Among these events was the presidential election of 1936, in the course of which antagonistic forces clashed. The different classes and political parties defended their interests and demands. In that year's political campaigning, the labor question occupied a prominent place, influencing the character of social conflict.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE WORKING CLASS IN THE 1936 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The election campaigns of 1936 took place against the background of the improving economic situation. Roosevelt's New Deal had stimulated industry and agriculture. Having strengthened their positions and recovered from the blows of the crisis, the right-wing elements were working for the repeal of the laws on industrial recovery (N.I.R.A.) and agricultural recovery (A.A.A.) that had been passed by Congress in the summer of 1933. Ultimately, the Supreme Court nullified both these laws. The political situation was characterized by acute struggle between different factions of the ruling class around questions of domestic and foreign policy that were largely associated with the consequences of the crisis and depression.

Not surprisingly, the different classes and political parties all pinned their hopes on the coming election. The bourgeoisie, as before, strove to come out of the depression at the expense of the working people. The Democratic and Republican parties, the two organized forces of the bourgeoisie, took different approaches to the question of how to surmount the difficulties connected with the crisis and depression. Most of the Democrats, headed by Roosevelt, having come out with the New Deal, felt in to be wisest and most flexible to use liberal methods of government. Influential circles in the Republican Party preferred stiffer measures to hold on to power. Naturally, one of the main questions drawing the greatest attention of both parties was the labor question. Each tried to reflect it in its election platform.



On June 9, 1936, the Republican national convention opened in Cleveland. Of all its main documents, the election platform was of great significance. One of its first points was the demand to support the American system of free enterprise and private competition, and the principles of "equal opportunity". These propositions linked the two parties together. Both proceeded from the immutability of the principles of the capitalist system. However, in a number of other points in their platforms, there were important tactical differences stemming from the struggle between the two parties to gain control of state power.

Roosevelt's New Deal was in the focus of the Republican attacks. Criticizing his policy, the Republicans demanded its abolition on the grounds that it led to a higher cost of living, rising unemployment and a decline in the purchasing power of the masses. Their platform called for destroying the system of government interference in and regulation of the economy. Then followed promises to protect the rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively, to eliminate the speedup system, to ban child labor, and to protect women and adolescents from excessive exploitation, poor working conditions and low wages. The most surprising promise, however, was the demand to strengthen the criminal and civil laws against monopolies and trusts to a point that would have made their existence impossible. Manifested here was the desire to use the anti-monopoly sentiments of the great mass of voters and, through demagoguery and deception, win their support. One of the vulnerable points in the Republican platform was the promise to create a decent system and consistently to remove supporters of the New Deal from power. The convention nominated the Governor of Kansas, Alfred Landon, for president, and Chicago publisher Frank Knox, for vice-president.

The Democrats did not lag behind in their ability to make promises. The Democratic Party held its convention in Philadelphia on June 23, 1936. Senator Robert Wagner headed the committee to work out the platform. It declared that the Democratic Party would strive to ensure a high level of production and consumption, and made many promises to workers about increasing wages, reducing hours, and improv-

ing working conditions. Praising the achievements of their party, the authors of the platform assured the American people that thanks to their policy the country had "returned to the road of freedom and prosperity". The platform attacked the monopolies and promised to beef up criminal and civil legislation against trusts and corporations.

Regardless of the similarities between the two platforms, the Democratic Party held stronger positions than its rival. The Wagner Act, the Social Security Act, the law prohibiting strikebreaking, the housing law, and appropriations for unemployment benefits and public works all worked in favor of Roosevelt and his party. The workers and trade unions with growing interest watched the events in the White House and Congress in anticipation of possible improvements for themselves. Declaring unemployment to be a "national problem", the Democrats promised to expand the federal public works program. And it was not only in this national problem that the federal government was declared to be a major factor. The Democrats stressed that the Republican platform presumed that most of the difficult national problems would be handled by states, and maintained that this was a big weakness in that platform. They assured workers and farmers that the Democrats would solve these problems through the joint efforts of both state and federal legislative and executive bodies.

Further, the Democrats announced their intention to undertake measures in the fields of civil liberties, housing construction, etc. Their platform was almost identical to the Republicans' on this score. The Democratic convention nominated Franklin Roosevelt for president, and John N. Garner for vice-president.

During the pre-election period, a third group called the Union Party was formed, headed by William Lemke (Rep., N.D.), a member of the House of Representatives. At first, this "party" drew a considerable number of supporters who were lured by the demands it set forth. Among these were demands to protect property from heavy taxation, prohibit the import of agricultural products and other goods that were produced in the U.S., establish pensions for all citizens over 60 years of age, provide medical assistance under the control of the states, and

to withdraw from any foreign alliances that might ensnare the United States.

The Union Party convention was held on August 16, 1936, in Cleveland. Father Charles E. Coughlin delivered a sermon at the convention. It was an anti-communist demagogic speech, full of appeals and empty promises. Coughlin attacked Jews, Roosevelt and Landon. Lemke and his assistant, Thomas O'Brien, addressed the convention and both swore that they would smash Roosevelt and Wall Street and win the election. This convention nominated William Lemke for president. The demagoguery of the "party" soon became evident, and the strength of the two-party system was overwhelming, so when the election came Lemke won only a very insignificant number of votes.

Among the other parties taking part in the election was the Communist Party of the U.S.A. All kinds of impediments were put in its way. The tasks of the Communists in connection with the 1936 election were discussed at the ninth party convention in late June 1936, in New York. The main resolution at that convention was "The Struggle Against Reaction, Fascism and War". The main tasks in the election campaign were defined in Section IV of that resolution, "Policies in the National Elections of 1936".

This was a program of struggle to improve the material conditions of the working people through shifting the burdens of the depression onto the monopolies, to bridle them, to defend civil liberties and preserve peace. The Party considered it necessary "to promote the organization of the power of the working class and its allies for the higher stages of struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism".<sup>1</sup> The Party kept the same slogans it had advanced at the preceding election. In Section V, "Building and Strengthening the Communist Party", the ninth convention called upon all Party organizations to follow the guidelines set by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. The main slogans were: a united front within the working class; joint actions with Socialist and progressive organizations in the labor movement; and unity of action by all progressive organizations of the

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, New York, 1936, p. 31.

American people. The Communists remained advocates of creating a farmer-labor party and exposed the policies of the bourgeois power elite.

The Party was confronted with considerable difficulties in its campaign due to the fact that it was small in numbers and had very limited funds at its disposal. C.P. membership was 10,000 in 1930, 24,000 in 1934, and 30,000 in 1935. In 1936, the Party had from 45,000 to 50,000 members. Although its influence during those years had noticeably increased, the Party's gain in votes went from 33,000 in 1924 to 100,000 in 1932, and 111,000 in the 1934 Congressional election.

The Communist Party regarded a Democratic administration as the "lesser of two evils" in comparison with a Republican administration. In the 1936 election campaign, the Party announced that it would support neither Landon nor Roosevelt, and came out with its own platform. It concentrated its attacks against Landon and Lemke, thereby in essence giving indirect support to Roosevelt.

The Communists nominated their own candidates: Earl Browder for president, and James Ford, a Black, for vice-president. With great difficulty it succeeded in getting its candidates on the ballot in 34 states. At the same time, Communists ran for governor in 11 states, for the Senate in 6, and for the House of Representatives in 9. All in all, the Party ran 64 candidates for the House of Representatives, including 35 from New York, 12 from California, and 9 from New Jersey. These figures are significant in that they clarify the question of the Party's activity in the states.

The election platform adopted at the ninth convention stated that the attempt to re-establish the standard of living had failed, that there were 12 million unemployed in the country, that workers' wages had been halved, that half of the farmers had lost their land, and that millions of young Americans had no prospects for raising families and having their own homes. Further, the platform defined the goals of the Party and called on workers to organize under their own banner, that is, build a farmer-labor party which would fight for a popular government.

However, the convention underestimated the difficulties involved in forming a national farmer-labor party out of the



petty-bourgeois farmers' parties in separate states. In its platform it asserted that such a genuinely popular party was already on its way and uniting with powerful trade unions against the Republicans. Moreover, it predicted that that party would undeniably become the main rival in the 1940 presidential election.

Long before the convention, the Central Committee of the Communist Party had pointed to the great difficulties connected with the creation of a farmer-labor party. The main one had to do with the nature of the movement for that party. Prior to 1935, the Communists based their tactics on the experience of past years when there was no mass movement for a labor party in the country. In January 1935, a C.P. Central Committee plenum discussed three questions: the work of the Communists in the A.F.L. unions; a united front; and the question of a mass labor party. The main report, delivered by Hayes on January 15, noted that although the radicalization of the masses spurred on by the crisis was under way, it was not proceeding in the forms or on a scale that could ensure the rapid creation of a mass labor party. For five years, Hayes stressed, virtually no one had been able to do anything to materialize the idea of a labor party.

In 1934, the situation had changed, since in a number of states a broad movement for the creation of local farmer-labor parties had developed. And in 1935, this movement continued to expand. It was closely linked with the 1936 election, for at their conventions most of these parties discussed tasks relating to the election campaign. Reports kept coming in from various places about the emergence of farmer-labor organizations that called themselves parties. For example, such parties sprang up in New Hampshire, western Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, Detroit and Acron, Ohio. A movement was under way to set up similar parties in several other states and counties.

From a class standpoint, however, the movement was heterogeneous and politically mixed, which prevented it from creating stable and mass organizations capable of opposing the experienced adversaries in the bourgeois parties and reactionary organizations that were in a bloc with them. Many such groups were connected with the Democratic Party and

energetically supported Roosevelt and other Democratic candidates. In New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California and other states, such organizations considered their main task to be to get Roosevelt re-elected.

The Minnesota and Wisconsin Farmer-Labor parties adhered to an independent position vis à vis the two major bourgeois parties, yet most of their organizations and individual members intended to vote for Roosevelt. These parties recognized and supported the New Deal and were thereby connected with the Democratic Party. Both of these parties made an attempt to unite their efforts and even called a national conference for this purpose; but nothing practical came of it.

The appearance of local farmer-labor parties in the states made it necessary for the Communist Party to re-examine its view of the character of the movement. The above-mentioned Hayes report examined the possible patterns of the emerging third parties. Of the four possible types, three fit the pattern of La Follette's Progressive movement in Wisconsin, Sinclair's EPIC movement in California, or Governor Olson's Minnesota Farmer-Labor party. The latter party had been organized with the participation of the labor union bureaucracy and with the help of the local Socialists, but excluded Communists and other left-wing democratic figures.

All these parties were in fact non-proletarian organizations in which petty-bourgeois and big-farmer elements prevailed. Such associations were ideologically and organizationally unstable. They easily succumbed to the influence of bourgeois ideology and ultimately fell in with the political parties of the bourgeoisie, especially the Democrats. Even the seemingly more stable progressive parties in Minnesota (Olson's party) and Wisconsin (the La Follette brothers' party) were later absorbed by the Democratic Party.

The most radical direction in the movement for a mass third party, the report noted, was that of building an organization from the grass-roots level, with a preponderance of labor unions in its make-up and with the active participation of democratic elements. This type of party could, in cooperation with the Communists, mount a struggle against bureaucracy and the monopolies, and establish close ties with the masses. It had to become an anti-monopoly party, standing on the

positions of class struggle. The report stressed, moreover, that while none of the above-named types of third party could develop in pure form, even so, certain specific distinctions would inevitably show through in each of these directions. Therefore, the Communist Party was working not simply for the creation of a mass third party, but against the tendency of its being steered into the channel of bourgeois liberal politics. The C.P. plenum made a critical evaluation of the activity of the party headed by La Follette in Wisconsin. At that point, the Communist Party followed a similar line with respect to the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party as well.

Hailing and supporting the activity of the working people in the struggle to form a third party, the Communists at the same time explained that due to specific conditions existing in each state the movements there were at different stages and levels. Consequently, before embarking on the creation of such a party on a national scale, the Central Committee plenum considered it necessary to study the local situations, ascertain the balance of forces and the progress of the movement, and help local third-party organizations in each state in their preparations for unification on a national scale.

In discussing this question in January 1935, the Central Committee plenum stressed that the Communists were not yet ready to organize such a party, that conditions for it would mature only when the broad masses in the hundreds of thousands began to call for such a party through their trade unions, church groups, local organizations, etc. In many states, however, the movement for forming city and county farmer-labor parties in the summer of 1936 fell into Roosevelt's following, thereby losing its independence and turning into a supplementary mechanism to win votes for the candidates of his party. That is why in 1936 the Communist Party had no chance of cooperating with the local farmer-labor organizations into whose leadership bourgeois leaders had penetrated. Only in some states did the Communists support candidates put up by such organizations, while also concentrating their efforts on the struggle for an independent political line in the election campaign.

One of the hardest tasks facing the Communist Party during the 1936 election campaign was that of creating a united front.

The main thing for all left democratic figures in this struggle was to achieve unity of action with the labor movement. As we have already noted, it was with this aim that the Trade Union Unity League decided to disband and advise its trade unions to join the A.F.L. As far as the Communist Party itself was concerned, it advanced the slogan "For a United and Powerful A.F.L." The January 1935 Central Committee plenum interpreted the problem of a united front primarily as one of labor movement unity. It was then that the Communists focussed their main efforts on working within the A.F.L. While working for the creation of industrial trade unions, they strove to keep them in the A.F.L. Time and again, the Communists called on the A.F.L. top leadership to agree to joint actions with farmer-labor organizations and the Communist and Socialist parties. However, the Federation's leaders rejected the united front proposals and did everything they could to ban the activities of Communists in the trade unions and expel them from these working-class organizations.

A no less difficult task for the Communist Party was that of establishing a united front with the Socialists. The latter were hostile to the idea. They preferred to act alone and ignored any attempts to work out a common tactic for all democratic forces. All this only served to weaken the position of the left wing of the labor movement, disunited the progressive forces, and hampered the Communists' and Socialists' ties with the masses of workers. As a result, neither was able to win anything close to broad voter support in 1936.

Both the Communist and the Socialist parties could have played a more significant role during the election had they been able to unite their efforts. But this did not happen. Yet it was impossible to miss the fact that the influence of the Socialists had fallen sharply during the preceding elections. In 1932 they had received 678,708 votes for their candidates, but only 321,824 in the 1934 Congressional election. It would seem that this alone was a strong enough argument in favor of a tactic of joint actions with the Communists and the farmer-labor and trade union organizations.

In April 1936, the Socialist Party announced that it would take part in the elections not only for congressmen but also for the presidency. At the same time, the Socialists opposed any



cooperation with the Communists in this major area of political struggle. On behalf of his party, Norman Thomas replied to Communist proposals for joint actions: "I am against a formal political united front with the Communists in this Presidential campaign."<sup>1</sup> At best, the Socialists agreed to limited actions with many groups, including the Communist Party, in such measures as defending the victims of anti-Negro tyranny or holding May Day demonstrations. However, repeating the anti-communist fabrications about "the hand of Moscow", Thomas added: "But a political united front is another matter. The differences between us preclude organic unity."<sup>2</sup>

This, in general outline, was the position of the Socialist Party with respect to the election campaign and the united front tactic.

As concerned the broader concept of a united front connected with the movement for a third party, here too the Socialists disposed of the matter with general phrases without backing them up with any practical activity. Replying to the question about the character of a farmer-labor party, Thomas stated that as a mass instrument of the workers in the struggle for socialism such a party would be useful. Calling such an organization "a small coalition of radicals", the Socialist leader tried to instill in the minds of workers a disbelief in the effectiveness of struggle for the creation of a third party. The Communist press wrote: "Thomas' entire attitude toward this question gives no indication that he regards it as urgent.... For him the Farmer-Labor Party is something that is merely 'useful'. He then proceeds to raise so many objections concerning the concrete efforts for a Farmer-Labor Party (which are now being made) that the effect is to throw cold water on the whole idea. Thomas seems to view the problem of a Farmer-Labor Party this year as revolving entirely around the question of who will be its candidate for President. For him it does not seem to be a question of a serious political party, with a clearcut program of immediate demands in the interests of the great masses of the people...."<sup>3</sup> The leader of the Social-

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, April 16, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

ists considered it safer for the party to act alone, avoiding matters of principle so as not to bring down the wrath of the ruling circles because of its "dangerous links" with the Communists. This was the old tactical line of the Right-wing Socialists.

As for Socialist leaders David Dubinsky, Luigi Antonini and others like them, it must be said that they were far from even thinking about any united front. In the spring of 1936, they were not averse to defecting from the Socialist Party and extolling Roosevelt and the Democratic Party. In their unions they all actively came out against a really popular and mass party and against unity of action. In this respect they kept pace with the bourgeois liberals, although they did like to make a display of their democratic natures and demagogically wave slogans calling for struggle to create a third, or labor, party. It was not surprising that not only the leadership of the A.F.L., but also that of some unions which had temporarily associated themselves with the C.I.O., eschewed the task of creating a third, farmer-labor, party. Both groups were against it and put every obstacle in the way of its creation.

The Democratic and Republican parties and their candidates, Roosevelt and Landon, were leading in the election race. Their trips around the country and the results of the primary elections, for example, testified to this. The Republicans and Democrats enjoyed the enormous financial support of the monopolies. The two parties spent tens of millions of dollars on their campaigns. Holding mass meetings, renting premises, giving banquets and official luncheons, paying a huge army of reporters, bribing newspaper editors, making use of the radio and motion pictures, advertizing and much else—all this required colossal sums of money, with which the bourgeois parties were not close-fisted.

Most of the organized workers came out in support of the Democratic Party and its leader, Roosevelt. On May 11, 1936, the labor unions that had founded the Committee for Industrial Organization, together with some individual A.F.L. figures, created a Non-Partisan Labor League, with headquarters in Washington. The League was financed by the C.I.O. George Berry, the head of the pressmen's union (A.F.L.) became its official president, and Sidney Hillman was made secretary-treasurer. (When in 1937 Berry was elected to the

Senate from the state of Tennessee, John L. Lewis became the League's actual leader.) The League's immediate goal was to mobilize worker vote for the Democratic Party and Roosevelt. It was supported by the industrial unions associated with the C.I.O. In addition, a number of A.F.L. organizations joined the League. The Labor League often entered into cooperation with Farmer-Labor parties in some states, where they jointly campaigned for Roosevelt.

Although the League's immediate aim was Roosevelt's election, its founders regarded it as a permanent body whose purpose it was to educate union members during election years. Green and his like-minded colleagues in the A.F.L. took a hostile attitude to the League, especially after George Berry left it, and urged their trade unions to refrain from giving it any kind of support or to take part in its work.

Over 35,000 officials of national and local unions took an active part in the League's activity. The Communist Party viewed the League as a powerful force in the elections and in conducting agitational and organizational work. The broad masses of organized workers were drawn into the election campaigning. Their participation in the struggle in many ways promoted the growth of their political activity and consciousness.

However, the nature of the Non-Partisan Labor League's activity at that time prompted the Communists to point out that the League was improperly named, for in fact it pursued the aim of blocking the movement for a farmer-labor party and diverting it onto the tracks of the New Deal. These people, the Communist *Daily Worker* said, the Hillmans and the Berrys, are now saying to the workers: first we have to elect Roosevelt, and then the Non-Partisan Labour League will be organized into a labor party.

In April 1936, the American Labor Party (A.L.P.) was founded in the New York State. Of all the local labor parties, it was to be the longest lasting. It would be in existence for almost 20 years, during which time it would influence the development and struggle of the left progressive forces in the labor movement, in particular, the course of the election campaigns in the state. It was organized with the active participation of the industrial unions of the State of New York, and it was no

accident that Sidney Hillman, David Dubinsky, George Berry and other union leaders were at the head of the A.L.P. during its first years. This association was built on the principle of collective membership. Members of the C.I.O. labor unions of the State of New York were automatically considered to be members of the A.L.P., as a result of which it had 400,000 working people in its ranks. The A.L.P. membership also included over 200 labor unions, many of whose leaders figured in the leadership of the party.

Since this party was only being formed in 1936 it did not have a chance to do any extensive work during that year's electioneering. Though it came out against the corruption and bossism of Tammany Hall, the Democratic Party machine in New York, in practice it supported Democratic candidates. Later on, it advanced its own candidates for municipal government offices and for the U.S. Congress. It won five seats on the city council in 1936 and 1937.

There were various attitudes to the emergence of this party among influential political circles. The Democratic Party and Roosevelt hoped to turn it into a supplementary campaign mechanism. The Republicans took a cautious and biased view of it. They would have liked to win over most of the workers of the State of New York to their side, but they realized how strong their opponents' influence was there. The A.F.L. top officials looked upon the appearance of this party with indignation, for they felt that this development was the consequence of intrigues by Lewis, Murray, Hillman and other leaders. In some quarters, the creation of the A.L.P. was even ascribed to the Communist Party of the U.S.A.

The Communists realized that the A.L.P. was created at the initiative of the Non-Partisan Labor League with the chief aim of re-electing Roosevelt. This did not prevent the Communist Party from defining its attitude to the A.L.P. as one of good will. The leaders of the Communist Party again firmly declared that they considered the building of a militant, mass farmer-labor party and the unity of all progressive forces to be the only guarantee against a victory for reaction. The Party therefore regarded the creation of the A.L.P. as a progressive step. At the same time, the Communists were critical of the narrow goals of the new party, since they were limited to election



campaigning, and that—in the interests of the bourgeois Democratic Party. Hence, this was a labor party that considered it impossible to follow an independent road of struggle, preferring instead to go the way of the two-party system, but choosing the “lesser evil”. The Communist Party repeatedly drew attention to the many vacillations of the leaders of the new party. The instability was in many ways due to the reluctance shown by Hillman and other A.L.P. leaders to make any effort to establish a really united front in the trade unions and working-class circles.

On November 3, 1936, presidential and congressional elections were held throughout the country. Roosevelt won, receiving 27.9 million votes to Landon's 16.5 million. The Republicans got 755,000 more votes for president than they did in 1932, while the Democrats' increase was five million. Thus, the absolute majority of the votes cast were for Roosevelt. The other parties received only small support from the voters. For example, Lemke from the Union Party received 648,000 votes, the Socialists—187,000, and the Communists—80,000. As for the elections to the 75th Congress, the Senate ended up with 76 Democrats, 16 Republicans and 4 senators from other parties; in the House of Representatives there were 331 Democrats, 89 Republicans, and 13 members from other parties. It was a big victory for the Democratic Party and Roosevelt. On January 20, 1937, he went to the White House for his second term as President.

Thus, the 1936 election campaigning showed an almost complete dependence of the working class on the bourgeoisie, and on the Democratic Party, in particular. At the same time, it must be said that the political activity of the workers and their organizations was one of the main reasons for the victory of the faction of the bourgeoisie that was following a liberal course in domestic policy, and the defeat of the more reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie, represented by the Republican Party.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE LATE 30s

The stormy thirties were attended by a stubborn strike struggle for bread, work and freedom. The upsurge of the strike movement which had begun in 1933 continued in the second half of that decade, to reach its peak in 1937, as can be seen from the following figures:<sup>1</sup>

	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Number of Strikes	2,014	2,172	4,650	2,772	2,613
Workers Involved (in thousands)	1,120	788	1,875	688	1,170
Man-days Idle (in millions)	15.5	13.9	28	9.1	17.8

Millions of workers rose to the struggle, with new sections of the proletariat being drawn into its orbit. Miners, electricians, chemical workers, maritime workers, longshoremen, steelworkers, auto workers, textile workers, needle workers, fur workers, leather workers, and many others made a resolute stand for organization.

Among the basic reasons for the strike struggle of those years were, as before, the hard living conditions resulting from low wages, mass unemployment, and the absence of safety

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1953, p. 222; *Trade Union Facts*, New York, 1939, p. 9; *CR*, March 25, 1938, p. 5394, May 10, 1938, p. 8672.

measures in the plants. The accident rate in industry reached dangerous proportions. According to an A.F.L. executive council report to the 58th convention in 1937, there were 7,513,000 unemployed. The 1937-38 crisis brought the unemployment figure up to 11,445,000. In May 1935, there were about 500,000 unemployed in the A.F.L. alone, or 21 per cent of the Federation's membership. Workers still holding jobs also suffered from the unemployment situation because of its pressure on the wage level.

Let us examine the economic position of the great bulk of employed workers at that time.

Although the average nominal wage had risen somewhat in 1935 and 1936, wages were still extremely low, and the cost of living had gone up. In manufacturing, for example, the average wage was \$22.60 a week in 1936 and \$24.95 in 1937, to drop to \$22.70 in 1938 as a result of the crisis. The average wage in mining for those years differed from these figures by only a few cents; only on the railroads did workers receive five to seven dollars more per week than the workers in manufacturing. Wages were relatively higher in some heavy industries, especially in oil refining, auto, and shipbuilding. At the same time, wages in the chemical and non-ferrous metals industries were almost at the same level as those of workers in the food industry; on the whole, the average wage in manufacturing corresponded with that in the chemical and non-ferrous metals industries. Below this level were wages in the leather, textile, lumber and woodworking, and tobacco industries. The low average hourly rates and weekly wages would indicate that these industries employed a great many unskilled and unorganized workers whose incomes were even lower.

Differences in skill and racial differences figured in wage setting. Roosevelt cited data in a National Economic Council report testifying to the deplorable living and working conditions of Negro workers in 13 Southern states from Virginia to Texas. The President called this situation in the South the number one economic problem. The average annual earnings of the workers (including all sectors of the economy in the Southern states in 1937) amounted to \$313, as compared with \$604 for the rest of the country. The average annual wage of industrial workers in the South (including white workers) was

\$865, as compared with \$1,219 in other parts of the country. Some categories of workers employed in railroad or highway construction and repairs, lumberjacks, and Negro and white agricultural workers on the cotton and tobacco plantations received as low as \$6.92 a week, or \$320 a year in 1935.<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx's statement that "the agricultural laborer is ... reduced to the minimum of wages, and always stands with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism"<sup>2</sup> becomes strikingly clear when the above-indicated income is compared with the cost of living in the Southern states, where a minimum of \$25 per week (or \$1,210 per year)<sup>3</sup> was needed to support a family of four.

Even so, the average wage figures by themselves do not reflect the picture of the standard of living. They can give some idea of the budget only when compared with the real annual expenses of the average American family. Government data on the cost of living in 59 cities, at prices of March 1935, cite a figure of \$1,260 as the annual expenses for a family of four.<sup>4</sup> However, the cost of living fluctuated and often rose above this level.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Labor Department admitted that expenses in 1936 fluctuated between \$1,200 to \$2,000.<sup>6</sup> And this was at a time when 10 percent of the U.S. population could spend an average of only \$500 a year per family,<sup>7</sup> while 5,800 families, or 21 percent, could spend no more than \$1,000 each.<sup>8</sup>

The cost of living kept rising. One price study covering 58 basic foodstuffs showed that while in 1933 the average family spent \$264 for the necessary quantity, it had to spend \$331 for the same in 1935.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro*, New York, 1944, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1972, p. 602.

<sup>3</sup> CR, March 8, 1938, Appendix, p. 4097.

<sup>4</sup> CR, December 14, 1937, p. 1971.

<sup>5</sup> CR, November 23, 1937, Appendix, p. 587.

<sup>6</sup> CR, March 8, 1938, Appendix, p. 4097.

<sup>7</sup> CR, November 19, 1937, p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> CR, July 31, 1937, pp. 7937-38.

<sup>9</sup> Library of Congress, John Ph. Frey Papers, Container 5, Folder 67, Chester Wright's Labor Letter, August 1, 1936.



Characterizing the housing conditions in the country, Congressman Hamilton Fish (New York) said in the House of Representatives on June 30, 1937 that millions of people were living in shameful conditions, thousands of families had no roof over their heads, billions of dollars of capital investments were jeopardized, and cities were on the verge of bankruptcy. The nation was experiencing the worst housing crisis in its history. Not surprisingly, the annual family expenses of \$1,260 cited above for 1935 grew to \$1,317 in 1937.<sup>1</sup> On April, 8, 1938, Harry Hopkins, close advisor of Roosevelt, told a Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief about poverty and about workers who were poorly dressed, lived in impoverished conditions and lacked medical care. A labor newspaper wrote that there was only one answer to the robbery being committed by the trusts, whose profits had reached the 1929 level, and that was organization.

Low wages and high cost of living were not the only things causing worker discontent. Hours and working conditions had a big influence on the life of their families. A 10-hour day was not rare in industry. Despite the gains of the American proletariat in the struggle for the eight-hour day in the past, big business clung tenaciously to the old system, grossly flouting the demands of the working masses. That is why in those years, too, one of the demands in the strike movement had to do with shorter hours. The demand for the 40-hour week became one of the fighting slogans.

In their race to cut production costs employers, and the foremen, inspectors and controllers who did their bidding, imposed technical standards on workers which required that the latter strain all their energies, physical and mental, to the utmost. Machines and conveyors passed their rates of speed on to the workers, turning them into appendages and subordinating them to the general speed-up. With the introduction of the conveyor system, the contradictions between employers and workers became sharper. Under conditions of capitalist relations, technological progress served the interests of monopolies. If you don't carry out your operations in the time allotted by the conveyor, you will disrupt its movement and

<sup>1</sup> CR, March 8, 1938, Appendix, p. 4097.

have to suffer the consequences. Outside the factory gates stand others just waiting for a job.

Accidents were widespread in industry, and occurred most often in mines. "In most mining communities," wrote James Wechsler, "the memorable legends are of violence, uncertainty, suffering, sudden death. The chronic sickness of the coal industry is a plague that may recur at any time. The sound in the night may be an explosion heralding community disaster."<sup>1</sup>

The accident statistics were a bill of indictment against the capitalists. Suffice it to say that in 1934 alone 30,000 men were killed in American industry; 74,777 suffered dismemberment of one or more parts of the body, 78,608 suffered partial permanent disability; and over 3,000,000 were disabled for less than six months.<sup>2</sup>

These were some of the features of the economic position of the workers and some of the reasons for their strike movement in the 1930s.

In comparison with the proletariat, the American bourgeoisie had many invaluable advantages. It was armed with capital, controlled the commanding heights in the country, enjoyed the support of the government, and acted as a united force. The total number of capitalist companies in business was variable. Many, upon appearing on the scene, entered into fierce competitive struggle with the monopolies and either fell as victims of competition or merged with others to form bigger amalgamations. As a result, the actual number of companies in existence tended to increase in some periods and decline in others. As a consequence of economic instability and the 1937-38 crisis, this process of the rise and fall of capitalist companies increased even more in the second half of the thirties. There was a great number of small companies which became relatively easy prey for big capital. In 1934, 410,626 companies were operating in industry.<sup>3</sup> The aggregate assets of

<sup>1</sup> James A. Wechsler, *Labor Baron. A Portrait of John L. Lewis*, New York, 1944, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Minton and John Stuart, *Men Who Lead Labor*, New York, 1937, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> CR, May 27, 1938, Appendix, p. 10099.

only 761 of them amounted to \$50,000 million, or over half of the assets of all companies, combined.<sup>1</sup> In 1937, there were 528,000 companies in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Among these were 386,000 small companies whose assets in 1934 had amounted to no more than 13 per cent of the total assets of all the companies in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The working class was also confronted by the large banks and insurance and finance companies, which had spread their influence over the whole country and entangled millions of American families in their tentacles. The preceding years had seen not only bank failures but also the centralization of resources, as a consequence of which between 1921 and 1936 the number of banks diminished from 30,848 to 15,988,<sup>4</sup> while bank resources climbed from \$49,721 million to \$67,525 million.<sup>5</sup>

Towering above the mass of banks were only 24 major banks, each with resources of over \$350 million. The combined resources of this group amounted to \$20,853 million in 1936,<sup>6</sup> with commanding positions held by such octopus-banks as Chase National Bank, Guarantee Trust Company, National City Bank, Bank of America, National Trust and Savings Association, and Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Company. Most of the banks in this group ran their financial operations from the Wall Street district in New York. At the apex of the pyramid of the "free society" stood the sovereigns of finance capital, the Morgans, Rockefellers, Du Ponts, Vanderbilts, Fords, Chryslers—representatives of the real and immutable government of the U.S.A.

In the struggle against the proletariat the big companies were united in such organizations as the National Association of Manufacturers (N.A.M.) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which represented industrialists, businessmen and financiers. These associations were the guiding centers for monopoly propaganda.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *CR*, November 16, 1937, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> *CR*, June 10, 1938, Appendix, p. 11678.

<sup>4</sup> *CR*, January 4, 1938, pp. 18, 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

The N.A.M. engaged in extensive propaganda activity, spending an average of \$500,000 annually and sometimes as much as \$750,000 on just the publication of pamphlets backing the supporters of the open shop, that is, the opponents of industrial trade unions. Pamphlets were distributed in the millions of copies. Some 240 radio stations broadcast materials directed against trade unions and strikes. Anti-trade-union films were shown in a number of motion picture theaters. A huge army of correspondents who submitted materials to thousands of newspapers was financed by N.A.M. funds and filled N.A.M. orders. The N.A.M. factory publications board issued bulletins and sent them out monthly to enterprises and local newspapers. Through various channels, this linked the association with countless monopolies, state manufacturers' associations, and employer associations in the various industries.

An idea of the real aims pursued by the ruling class in the second half of the thirties may be gleaned from the deliberations of the annual convention of this association held in late 1937 in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. The convention heralded the monopoly offensive against the trade unions to subordinate the latter to the interests of the N.A.M. A program of 14 points formulated there was spearheaded against the labor movement. Labor's chief demand for collective bargaining was classified as a purely "local" and "internal matter" of a strictly individual character.

Addressing itself to Congress, the convention demanded that the Wagner Act be "amended" to ban sit-down strikes, sympathy strikes, and industry-wide general strikes; to nullify the right of strikers to take part in collective bargaining and to make a provision for blacklisting them; to repeal that point in the law prohibiting the courts from interfering in disputes between employers and workers; to outlaw the movement of strikers and pickets from state to state; and to deprive trade unions of the right to raise funds for political purposes, particularly for the purpose of conducting election campaigns.

As we can see, the program was directed against the interests of workers and their unions. It was drawn up from the positions of the most reactionary circles of U.S. finance capital. If carried out, it would throw the labor movement back to



where it was in the twenties. Its main thrust was against the industrial labor unions and would inevitably evoke mass protests on the part of the workers. Only through struggle could they defend themselves and compel the employers to make concessions, to meet the demands of the unions and recognize them as the authorized organizations of the American proletariat.

Workers on the West Coast, particularly the seamen and longshoremen, were a prominent force in the strike movement. The general strike in San Francisco, described earlier, left a deep imprint on the labor movement. In their struggle for higher wages, better working conditions and recognition of newly-created labor unions, the workers strove for unity of action. With this aim, the seamen and longshoremen, radio operators, ship's cooks and stewards, warehousemen and fishermen formed a Federation of Pacific Unions (F.P.U.). The Federation emerged during the 1934 strike. Despite its organizational and structural weakness, the F.P.U. demonstrated the urgent need for a united front against the employers in any industry. This fact was brought out in a resolution of the 30th annual convention of the Pacific Coast District No. 38 International Longshoremen's Association.

A major F.P.U. action in the second half of the thirties was the strike of 40,000 seamen, longshoremen, radiomen and others that began on October 29, 1936, against the subversive activities of the shipowners and employers, whose aim it was to smash the unity of the maritime and port workers' unions. The seamen and longshoremen paralyzed navigation on the entire West Coast. While in 1934 they struck for the recognition of their unions, now they were fighting to consolidate the gains they had achieved. The strike ended in February 1937 with the signing of collective agreements on terms accepted in 1934. At the same time, the strikers fought against the corruption and bureaucracy of the A.F.L., whose executive council had declared the strike illegal.

Almost simultaneously, the East Coast seamen entered the struggle. In a letter to Roosevelt of June 30, 1936, Joseph Curran, one of the leaders of the merchant seamen, described working conditions on board the ships of the merchant fleet. He emphasized the intolerable safety conditions, as a result of

which both passengers and crews sailed at their own peril. In protest against the shipowners' irresponsible attitude toward safety, 5,000 seamen at the Port of New York went out on strike. They demanded better living conditions for the ships' crews, adequate provisions for safety at sea for passengers and crews, a 75 percent increment for overtime while at sea, an 8-hour day for stewards, an agreement on a nation-wide uniform contract for seamen of both coasts and the establishment of common contract termination dates.

The A.F.L. declared illegal this strike too. However, the C.I.O. supported the struggle of the East Coast seamen, and the F.P.U. gave them active assistance. Harry Bridges urged the seamen toward unity of actions and advocated the formation of a National Federation of Seamen. However, unity was impeded by the splitting position taken by the A.F.L. and the leadership of the Atlantic Coast longshoremen's union, headed by Joseph Ryan.

The strike lasted nearly 100 days. Its major result was the creation on May 1, 1937, of the National Maritime Union. The union launched a membership recruitment drive, as a result of which 65,000 East Coast seamen and 30,000 sailors on the internal navigable waters joined its ranks. Through collective bargaining the union won a \$100 per month wage for every seaman, an 8-hour day for ship's cooks and stewards, and overtime pay.

In August 1937, the N.M.U. set up a committee in New York to draw up the union's constitution. Two hundred delegates took part in this work. The union held its first convention in January 1938 in San Francisco. The West Coast seamen's union refused to take part in the work of the convention, since the N.M.U. leaders were against mounting a broad movement among unorganized workers.

After fruitless efforts by left-wing figures within the A.F.L. to change the Federation's line, the longshoremen of the West Coast turned to the C.I.O. In 1937, the longshoremen and warehousemen organized a combined union, which thereupon affiliated with the C.I.O.

In April 1938, the first convention of the new International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union was held in Aberdeen, Washington. The convention elected the union

leadership with Harry Bridges as president. The president of the union became also the director of the Pacific Coast department of the C.I.O., and the union itself became a strong and reliable bulwark of the movement for mass industrial unions on the West Coast.

The struggle of the left forces in the western part of the United States demonstrated strong worker sentiment in favor of the industrial form of union organization. Expressing this sentiment of the majority of the workers in California, Oregon and Washington, Harry Bridges said at a meeting in 1936: "Of course, we favor industrial unionism.... We are strongly opposed to splitting the labor movement. But as yet possibilities of industrial unionism on the West Coast are hard to predict. The first job here is to organize the unorganized on an industrial basis ... the real drive, of course, must start in the mass industries—in steel, auto, rubber."<sup>1</sup> And, indeed, the drive to organize industrial unions and bring unorganized workers into them was launched precisely in those industries.

The steelworkers were one of the significant segments of the American proletariat. They worked primarily at large enterprises with many employees. At the same time, this segment was the least organized, with only a small part belonging to the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers of America and company craft unions. There was no united industrial organization to defend the interests of the masses of steel workers.

The 54th convention of the A.F.L., held in San Francisco in 1934, adopted a resolution introduced by John L. Lewis concerning the need to create an industrial union in this industry. The document stressed the danger to the whole labor movement of the absence of a steelworkers' union. A similar resolution was proposed by John B. Crozier at the 55th A.F.L. convention in October 1935, since Lewis' resolution had been virtually ignored by the top leaders of the A.F.L. The resolution was winning support among the mounting mass movement in the steel, auto, construction, oil, rubber, chemical, and many other industries. Groups of supporters emerged

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Minton and John Stuart, *Op. cit.*, p. 195.

at enterprises, construction sites, in the mine pits, oil fields and ports.

On June 3, 1936, an agreement to create a union was signed in Washington between the Committee for Industrial Organization and the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers of America, and a Steel Workers Organizing Committee (S.W.O.C.) was formed. At Lewis' proposal, the S.W.O.C. was headed by Philip Murray, vice-president of the miners' union and one of Lewis' closest associates, who was destined to play a prominent role in the U.S. labor movement.

The first meeting of the 12-member committee under his chairmanship took place on June 16, in Pittsburgh. Among the members were representatives of the unions that had established the C.I.O.

Under the leadership of the S.W.O.C., thousands of activists launched a drive among unorganized workers at plants of the United States Steel Corporation, Bethlehem Steel, Republic Steel, Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co., and the Johns and Laughlin Steel Corporation. Over 4,000 of the S.W.O.C. activists came from the clothing workers', typographers' and miners' unions. During the mass campaign to create industrial unions, the Communist Party sent its representatives into the steel industry. There were Communist party units in large steel centers and enterprises. Cooperation was established between the S.W.O.C. chairman, Philip Murray, and the Communists. Of the 200 organizers on the S.W.O.C. payroll, some 60 were members of the Communist Party, and Murray and the other members of the committee were fully aware of this. The organizers made wide use of various means of relating to the workers in the workshops, at meetings, through the press, radio, leaflets and posters. Mass meetings of steelworkers were held in such steel centers as Farrell, Sharon, New Castle, Whitesfield, and Sharpsville.

In August 1936, the S.W.O.C. began publication of *Steel Labor*, which became the steelworkers' mass paper. In a regular column, entitled "Steel Workers Want to Know the Facts", the newspaper cited many glaring examples of worker exploitation by the steel companies. Wrote *Steel Labor*, "You, Mr. Steelworkers, produced 178 per cent more profits for the twelve leading steel companies in the first half of 1936 than you



produced in the first half of 1935. But you continued to labor for the same \$3.76 a day, or cut rate skilled wages you earned last year."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the workers had produced \$41 million worth of output in the first half of 1936, as compared with \$15 million for the same period in 1935.

The paper reported that, on the average, skilled workers received \$5 to \$6 a day, which in reality should have been the wage of a semiskilled worker, while skilled workers should have been getting \$9 to \$12 a day. It exposed the companies by showing the tremendous gap between the workers' wages and the salaries of the big bosses. Addressing Mr. Unskilled Steelworker, *Steel Labor* reminded him that he and his 199,000 co-workers were getting the same \$3.24, \$3.76 and \$3.88 a day they earned the year before.<sup>2</sup>

"Read and Cry!" the newspaper exclaimed, as it noted sarcastically that Charley Schwab from Bethlehem Steel received "only \$250,000 in 1934", which meant that he had to work for a mere thousand dollars an hour.<sup>3</sup> Some of its issues gave long lists of the names of the managers and captains of the steel industry and their fantastic salaries.

Twenty leading steel companies made a net profit of \$141.5 million in 1935. This meant that every worker at these companies' plants created an average of \$314 in profit. The most powerful of the top twenty, United States Steel Corp., made a profit of \$50.5 million, or over one-third of the aggregate profit of this group. It derived it from the labor of its 225,000 workers, truly the sole source of its might. On the average, every worker there created \$250 profit that year for the corporation's stockholders.

United States Steel was in the forefront of the biggest capitalist monopolies, and headed the resistance to the growing strike movement in the steel industry. Controlled by the American billionaires, the Morgans, this company was a powerful bastion of big capital among the hundreds of corporations. It was a veritable empire with its own pits, mines, chemical combines, railroads, port facilities, truck transport,

<sup>1</sup> *Steel Labor*, August 20, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Steel Labor*, October 20, 1936.

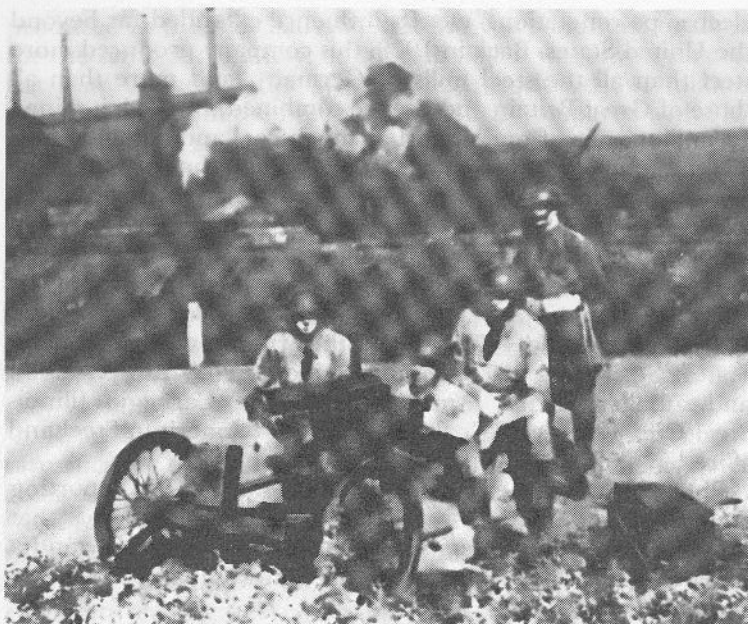
electric power stations, etc. Its influence extended far beyond the United States. Back in 1929, this company produced more steel than all the steel mills of Germany, and more than all those of Great Britain and France combined. In 1934, it mined 12 million tons of ore, almost as much coal and 6 million tons of limestone, and fired more than 5 million tons of coke. The corporation had 130 iron and steel mills, 101 blast furnaces, 375 open pits, 2,531 coking ovens, 82 coal mines and 89 iron mines. Annual output was 6 million tons of steel, which was only one-third of the corporation's production capacity. Its transportation system consisted of 4,000 miles of railroads, 109 freighters, and 487 barges on the Mississippi River. United States Steel had 15 subsidiary industrial, transportation and auxiliary firms. Among these were Carnegie Illinois Steel Co., Tennessee Coal and Iron, and American Steel and Wire.<sup>1</sup>

Representatives Henry G. Teigan of Minnesota in reporting these data to Congress, said that any attempt of that corporation's steelworkers to organize and win security and a decent wage for themselves was met with company terror and violence.

Companies of the Little Steel group, such as Bethlehem Steel, Republic Steel, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Inland Steel, followed the example of their senior partner. And they, in turn, were followed by dozens of other large and small companies: National Steel, Wheeling Steel, Johns and Laughlin Steel, Crucible Steel, American Steel Foundries, American Rolling Mill, Allegheny Steel, Pacific Coast Steel, Central Iron and Steel, and others. All of them together comprised a powerful defensive rampart for big monopoly capital in the steel industry. Most of the steel companies were interconnected by various threads of economic relations, but at the same time the main content of these relations was fierce competitive struggle.

In the face of the danger which the monopolies saw in the working class and its organizations, however, they always united. The bourgeoisie had some kind of organization in

<sup>1</sup> CR, June 9, 1938, Appendix, pp. 11472-74; *C.I.O. News*, February 2, 1938; J. R. Walsh, *Op. cit.*, p. 57.



15. National Guardsmen at the steel mill in Warren, Ohio, March 1937

every industry. In steel, it was the American Iron and Steel Institute, representing over 100 steel companies, which together produced over 95 percent of the country's steel.<sup>1</sup> The Institute had at its disposal unlimited financial resources for anti-labor propaganda, the main target of which was the C.I.O. Thus, for example, when the C.I.O. began its organizing drive in the steel industry in 1936, the Iron and Steel Institute used the services of 375 newspapers to publish various kinds of anti-labor stuff. The Institute was usually headed by bigwigs from the most powerful and influential steel companies. In 1937, its president was Eugene Grace, the head of Bethlehem Steel, and William Irwin, president of United Steel, and Tom Girdler, president of Republic Steel, were vice-presidents.

<sup>1</sup> CR, June 9, 1938, p. 11473.

The stronger and more extensive the organizing drive in the steel industry became, the sharper and fiercer was the struggle of the workers against the steel monopolies. It involved workers in the iron and coal mining industries and workers engaged in the transportation of ore from the Great Lakes basins. Intellectuals, including teachers, lawyers, journalists, supported the steelworkers.

Since a large proportion of the steelworkers were immigrants and Negroes, the C.I.O. devoted a great deal of attention to work among these groups of working people. On October 25, 1936, a conference was held in Pittsburgh to discuss the immigrant problems. The Communists took part in the preparations for and deliberations of the conference, which brought together 447 delegates, representing about 460,000 Americans of Lithuanian, Polish, Serbian, Slovenian, Ukrainian and Russian origin. Also present were representatives of some American churches, especially the Catholic Church.

On February 6, 1937, at the initiative of the Communists, a national conference of 110 Negro organizations was held in Pittsburgh, attended by 186 delegates representing 100,000 Negro workers. This action inspired a great number of Negroes to join the ranks of the new union.

Among the active organizers of the steelworkers were members of the Communist Party Central Committee who worked in Pittsburgh, Chicago and Gary, and there were quite a few Communists at enterprises in Cleveland. A prominent role in those years was played by William Z. Foster, William Weinstone, Jack Stachel, Gus Hall, John Steuben, William Geibert, Jack Johnston, Ben Carreathers, Pat Cush, Joseph Howard, George Morris, and others. The Communist Party published a special edition of the *Daily Worker* for the steelworkers. It was no easy job working on the creation of this union, especially for the Communists, whose activity was closely watched by F.B.I. agents sent in by J. Edgar Hoover. The leaders of the A.F.L., including Green and Frey, hunting for Communists in the labor unions, declared their activity to be illegal and subversive, calling it an infiltration by the Reds into the A.F.L. The executive council spent almost two weeks in session discussing this question in May 1936.

The activists in the struggle for industrial unions would have



achieved more significant successes had the left wing of the labor movement been able to create a broad united front of democratic forces. This is what the Communist Party had proposed as it advocated the need for and effectiveness of concerted actions by all anti-monopoly organizations. The first thing the Communists did was to urge the Socialists to join forces in the struggle for organizing unorganized workers into unions. On February 7, 1935, the C.P. Central Committee sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Socialist Party proposing a united front. The letter said, in part: "We propose to you that steps be taken to work out a common policy between the Socialist and Communist Parties...."<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party referred to the difficulty of the struggle to create trade unions, especially in the auto, steel, mining and textile industries. The letter noted: "We propose to you to instruct all Socialist Party members in the auto and steel industries to come together with the Communists in a united effort to build the United Automobile Workers Union and the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers into powerful unions capable to meet the situation. We have issued similar instructions to our members. We are prepared at any time to meet with a sub-committee from your organization to discuss these questions." However, the Socialist Party rejected the Communist Party's proposal.

The Communist Party made a similar proposal to the A.F.L., but the leaders of the Federation would not accept it.

The strikes and the campaign for union recognition and a collective agreement in the second half of the thirties constituted the most massive action in the history of the steelworkers' struggle. Due account was taken of the weaknesses and mistakes made in the famous steelworkers' strike of 1919. William Foster made a critical study of that strike in a booklet in which he called on the workers and labor unions to display solidarity and unity of actions. The Communist Party and the Slavonic sections of the International Workers Order played a significant role in the strike struggle.

The workers began their fight against the steel companies

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, February 8, 1935.

with demands for a 25 percent wage increase, a minimum daily wage of no less than \$5, and the 40-hour week. The C.I.O. and the S.W.O.C. urged the government to establish a minimum wage of no less than 62.5 cents an hour for workers at all steel mills whose owners received government contracts.

The year 1936 was marked by a noticeable growth in the membership of industrial unions. In early autumn, there were 82,000 members in the ranks of the S.W.O.C. union, and by the end of the year, the figure had grown to 125,000. The successes of the mass movement were so impressive that they influenced the outcome of the Committee's negotiations with the United States Steel Corporation. The enemies of labor unions advertised the agreement with this company as an example of peaceful cooperation between classes. What they usually kept quiet about, however, was the fact that behind Lewis and Murray stood 225,000 steelworkers who were ready to go out on strike at any moment if the management proved to be obstinate. But the potential threat of a strike was not the only reason why the company capitulated and signed a collective agreement.

An important factor was the famous auto workers' strike against the General Motors Corporation (to be discussed later), which preceded the signing of the collective agreement by the United States Steel Corporation. It was the key strike in those years, making a strong impression on the monopolies in other industries, United States Steel among them. That was why on March 17, 1937, without waiting for a strike call, company president Benjamin Fairless and S.W.O.C. leader Philip Murray signed a collective agreement with the Carnegie-Illinois Corp., a daughter company. The company recognized the S.W.O.C. and agreed to a ten-cent hourly wage increase, which meant raising the daily wage from \$4.20 to \$5.00. A 40-hour, five-day week with time and a half for overtime was established, and provision made for a one-week's annual paid vacation for employees who had worked for the company at least five years. For its part, the S.W.O.C. agreed that in the event a new dispute arose not to resort to the strike but to rely on negotiations and, if necessary, arbitration. This kind of agreement was later approved by most of the other steel companies.

With the signing of the collective agreement, the whole system of company unions collapsed at the United States Steel plants. Workers quit company unions en masse to join the S.W.O.C. industrial union. As a result, by May 1937, S.W.O.C. membership had mounted to 300,000.

The situation developed differently at plants belonging to a group of companies known as Little Steel, including Republic Steel, Bethlehem Steel, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Weirton Steel and Inland Steel. These companies refused to recognize the S.W.O.C. and the right of workers to bargain collectively. The president of Republic Steel Corp., T. M. Girdler, maintained that there was no economic justification for an increase in wages by his company. Murray declared in reply that there was, that a wage increase was warranted by the constant increase in the cost of living. Girdler, however, who received a yearly salary of \$140,778, was not interested in listening to complaints about the growth in the cost of living or the plight of workers' families. On behalf of Little Steel, he declared that he would not have a contract, verbal or written, with an "irresponsible, racketeering, communistic body like the C.I.O."

The C.I.O. and the S.W.O.C. were determined to wage an uncompromising struggle. They warned Girdler that a strike would be called in the seven states where the Little Steel plants were located and where 38,000 S.W.O.C. members were ready to stop work at Murray's first call. In May 1937, the Committee called a strike for a collective contract. The class struggle became acute as 75,000 workers of the various Little Steel plants stopped work. They immediately put out 300 pickets, and clashes with police and hired guards ensued. The resistance of the workers at the Bethlehem Steel and Republic Steel mills took the form of sit-down strikes. Similar strikes took place elsewhere in the steel industry, but they were particularly stubborn at the mills of the two above-mentioned companies. Once they stopped work, the workers did not leave their workshops, but remained inside the plants right up to the end of the strikes. Their wives and children brought them food and clothing, and union functionaries and volunteer agitators and organizers were the connecting link between the strikers and the outside world.

Although such strikes were not something new in the class struggle, workers in Italy, France and England had recourse to them only infrequently. In the United States, they had occurred in 1906 in Schenectady, New York, and again in 1933 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Austin, Minnesota, and South Bend, Indiana. In the second half of the thirties, they became a widespread means of struggle and caused heated controversy in Congress and in political, government, business, and labor circles. The reactions to sit-down strikes in the auto industry were particularly strong.

Events in Little Steel took a turn that was undesirable for the steel barons. Seeking to break the resistance of the workers, Bethlehem Steel and Republic Steel brought in police and hired gunmen. The Senate Civil Liberties Committee, headed by Senator Robert La Follette, Jr., investigated the situation and exposed the tyranny and brutality of these companies. Its report disclosed numerous cases where activists had been murdered, participants in pickets and demonstrations beaten, and mayors, sheriffs and other local authorities bribed.

Dozens of workers were killed and hundreds seriously wounded during peaceful marches and picketing. Thousands were beaten and jailed. The most brutal violence was the police attack against the steelworkers in Chicago on May 30 (Memorial Day), 1937, when ten steelworkers were killed and ninety wounded. The peaceful workers were attacked under the pretext of protecting the property of the Republic Steel Corp. Workers' blood was also spilled in the stronghold of Little Steel in Ohio, where workers were killed in Youngstown, Canton, Cleveland, Massillon and other towns.

Steelworkers came out in demonstrations in a number of cities. Men and women marched peacefully, carrying signs demanding the right to strike, to collective bargaining and to form unions. Among the demonstrators were Negroes and Puerto Ricans, to whom the C.I.O. promised the most sincere support. It was the purpose of the C.I.O. to effectively organize the working men and women of America regardless of their race, color, religion or nationality and to unite them into labor unions with the aim of mutual assistance and joint action in defense of their interests. This fully accorded with the sentiments and wishes of Negro workers, and for this reason





16. Striking steelworkers fired on in Chicago, May 30, 1937

more and more Negroes poured into the ranks of organized labor. There were 65,000 Negro steelworkers, mostly in Alabama, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland and Michigan, who were urged to join the organizing drive at the height of the strikes in Little Steel.

The National Negro Congress adopted a resolution approving the movement for industrial unions, and stressed that they opened the road to an effective solution of the problem of racial discrimination. Negro Baptist ministers representing 85 Baptist churches of Baltimore, at a monthly conference on December 12, 1936, unanimously approved the S.W.O.C. drive, pledged their full support, and indicated that their churches would be available for special meetings under S.W.O.C. auspices.

Among the rank-and-file ministers who took the side of the

steelworkers was the Reverend Orvil K. Jones of Youngstown, Ohio. However, Republic Steel and Youngstown Sheet and Tube, at whose plants Jones' parishioners were employed, organized his persecution. Testifying before the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, Jones exposed the campaign of vilification conducted against him by the steel corporations. He related that after one of his sermons in defense of the steelworkers, the president and vice-president of Youngstown Sheet and Tube let it be understood that if he ever again spoke at any worker meetings he had better leave Youngstown. The persecution was so dogged that Jones finally had to leave his parish.

Public opinion, mass protests against the terror, and the staunchness of the striking workers forced the companies to make concessions. They rehired the 5,000 workers who were fired during a mass lockout, and were compelled to pay them \$7.5 million in compensation and recognize the S.W.O.C.

The resistance of the other companies in Little Steel was also broken. That same year, most of the workers at the Johns and Laughlin Steel Corp. joined the union, and, in the long strike that ensued, forced the company to recognize the S.W.O.C. The smaller steel companies turned out to be more compliant and after brief skirmishes signed collective agreements. The S.W.O.C. was recognized by 104 companies in 1937.

As a result of the series of successful strikes, picketing and peaceful negotiations, the S.W.O.C. now represented 500,000 steel and allied workers at the plants of almost 450 corporations. The struggle of the steelworkers forced companies to agree to a 25 percent wage increase for workers who had joined the new union. Thus, wages went up from 47 cents an hour in 1929 to 62.5 cents in 1937. The daily wage rose from \$3.76 to \$5.00, while the average weekly wage went up from \$26 on the eve of the campaign to \$32 as its result. All in all, 1,080 locals won an aggregate annual wage increase of \$200 million.

Against the background of the steelworkers' first important successes, the first convention of the local S.W.O.C. unions was held from December 14 to 16, 1937 in Pittsburgh. It was attended by more than 1,000 delegates representing 550,000

steelworkers. They had 445 collective contracts, the practical results of the 18-month struggle for the labor union. Among the delegates were 59 Communists. Their presence was fully legitimate, but the list of the names of these Communists was later used by John F. Frey, the head of the metal workers' department of the A.F.L. and collector of secret information about the "infiltration" of Communists into the "Red C.I.O.". Most of the Communist delegates were from the biggest steel centers of the country, mainly Cleveland, Youngstown, Chicago, Warren, Gary, McKeesport, and Duquesne.

Thus, the steel plants were a gigantic arena of fierce class struggle. The steel industrialists put up violent resistance to the strike movement. The events that developed in that industry in many ways influenced the course of the struggle in other industries. *Business Week* magazine felt that if the workers won out in the steel industry, no other industry would be able to hold out. One such mass-production industry was the auto industry.

The automobile industry in those years was one of the strongest sectors of the American economy. The workers in that industry produced 2,250,000 trucks and passenger cars in 1920; 5,750,000 in 1929, and in 1936, 4,500,000 vehicles of all kinds, representing almost \$2,000 million in value. Eight out of every ten automobiles produced in the world were made in the United States, and 75 per cent of the autos manufactured in the U.S. were produced in the State of Michigan. Detroit and the towns around it, such as Flint, Highland Park, Pontiac, Hamtramck, River Rouge and Dearborn were the main centers of the industry. This sector of the economy was the country's biggest steel consumer. Not surprisingly, its size and the state of the auto business were important factors in the development of the steel industry.

The auto industry belonged above all to giant monopolies. In 1935, General Motors, Chrysler and Ford Motor Company owned assets of \$250,000 million. The main center of the Ford family's company was Dearborn. Its largest plant, in River Rouge, had 90,000 employees. This was a whole combine, including allied enterprises such as electric power stations, a glass

plant, engine building plants, a steel mill, coke ovens, laboratories, etc. In addition, Ford had another 17 auto plants scattered throughout the country from coast to coast. A total of 122,000 workers were employed at Ford plants, and in 1937 they produced almost 1.5 million vehicles.

The Chrysler company became a strong competitor of General Motors and Ford Motor Co. In 1936, 60,000 workers were employed at its plants and produced over a million automobiles, and the company's profits amounted to \$62 million.

The auto industry as a whole employed 450,000 workers. It should be noted that a large proportion of the auto workers in Michigan were immigrants; 47 out of every hundred workers in Detroit had come to the United States between 1922 and 1929. According to official data, 45 percent of all the workers in the auto industry in 1935 received less than \$1,000 a year each, which was much less than the subsistence minimum.

The workers in the auto industry were prompted by the same motives as workers in other industries to fight for unionization and collective bargaining. In 1935, local unions in the auto industry, with the active participation of federal labor union No. 18347, took the initiative in preparing and conducting their first convention with the aim of creating a united automobile workers' union. It now became clear to Green that if the A.F.L. delayed any longer, these unions would carry out this work on their own, and then he and the A.F.L. executive council would be isolated. Like it or not, he had to speed up his involvement in this movement.

A lively correspondence ensued between Green and Francisco Dillon, the A.F.L. general organizer in the auto industry, and local labor unions at the auto plants concerning preparations for the national convention of these organizations. The convention was held on August 26, 1935 in Detroit, and it was then and there that the International Union of the United Automobile Workers of America (A.F.L.) was founded. Green's man, Francisco Dillon, was elected president and Homer Martin, another of Green's supporters, who was then president of labor union No. 19320 at the auto plants in Kansas City, Missouri, became vice-president.

However, it was not enough just to create a union. Recognition of it by the monopolies and the employers in that industry



had to be won. The automobile kings ignored the newly-formed, industry-wide labor union. "We will never recognize the United Auto Workers or any other union," said Henry Ford. Rejecting the demands of the workers, he exclaimed that labor unions were the worst evil ever to afflict the world. Girdler and Ford shared a common ideology and had a similar philosophy. It was no accident that at different places they echoed each other. Like Girdler, Ford disregarded the Wagner Act. He ignored union demands and scorned all the rulings of the N.L.R.B. All this was brought out in the C.I.O. labor press in December 1937.

The struggle against Ford stretched out over a number of years. For a long time, the workers at his Dearborn plants could not make a breakthrough. Success came only in 1941. In the meantime the workers achieved only partial results. In response to Ford's refusal to recognize the union, the U.A.W. and C.I.O. leaders and the auto workers said, "Henry will either recognize the union or he won't build automobiles."<sup>1</sup>

A strike of 80,000 Ford workers at River Rouge was a sharp class struggle. A large local auto workers' union was created there, which in August 1938 joined the United Auto Workers as Local No. 600.

During those years, however, it was the General Motors Corporation and not the Ford Motor Company that was in the focus of the U.A.W.'s struggle. Established in 1908, the company was already challenging Ford's supremacy in the auto industry in the 1920s, and in fierce competitive struggle surpassed him, leaving him far behind. In the second half of the 1930s it was already producing as many cars as Ford, Chrysler and Studebaker put together. After that, General Motors became a giant corporation with assets of over \$1,268,532,000. It had 337,218 shareholders; however, almost half of them, or about 140,000, held 10 or fewer shares each. The controlling block was held by the Du Pont family, who owned 10 percent of all the shares and headed the top of the pyramid of this monopoly. In 1937, Lamont Du Pont, president of the Du Pont de Nemours Company, was chairman of the board of directors of General Motors, and Alfred P. Sloan was president of the corporation.

<sup>1</sup> CR, January 18, 1938, p. 733.

Of the country's 320,000 auto workers, 55 percent were employed at the 69 plants of this company. A deep chasm lay between the basic mass of workers and the top shareholders. While the average worker in 1935 was making \$900 a year, the top 350 company officials amassed the tidy sum of \$10 million. For example, president Sloan, vice-president William Nadsen, and chairman of the financial committee Donaldson Brown received the highest salaries—\$374,000, \$325,000 and \$249,000 a year, respectively. The lowest salaries in this group were more than \$50,000 a year.

Over 140,000 workers at General Motors plants joined the struggle for union recognition. The strike spread to all the 14 states where the company's plants were located.

In the winter of 1936-37, the workers of the General Motors' Fisher Body plants in Flint, Michigan, went on strike after G. M. vice-president Nadsen rejected the union's proposal to meet with union representatives for the purpose of concluding a collective agreement. Soon they were joined by General Motors workers in Detroit and Toledo. On November 18, strikes broke out at the plant in Atlanta, and on December 15, in Kansas City. On December 28, the workers at the Cleveland plant lay down their tools and turned off the machines. On December 30, 1936, the workers at the giant Chevrolet Plant No. 4 and Fisher Body Plants No. 1 and 2 went on strike.

From the outset, it was a sit-down strike and it effectively paralyzed production; the workers stayed in the workshops during the entire 44 days of the strike. While maintaining discipline and order and protecting all the equipment, machine tools, raw materials, etc., the workers took the necessary measures to prevent police and scabs from entering the plant yards and workshops. Strike committees were elected in each shop.

In a sit-down strike, with all personnel remaining in the workshop, anyone of several workers on the assembly line could give the signal to stop the conveyors, and the confused company agents were unable to put the finger on the signal man. With conveyors stopped, the representatives stepped forward and conducted negotiations on behalf of the workers, knowing that at that moment they were not threatened with dismissal. The sit-down strike tactic proved to be such a popular form of struggle that, having begun at General Motors plants in Flint, it soon

spread to all the enterprises in Detroit, and from there to other states.

The General Motors strike occurred at a difficult time. It was the winter of late 1936, and the country was on the brink of a new crisis. The strikers' families soon spent whatever little savings they might have put away. The weather was cold, and there was a shortage of fuel and food. The loss in wages was great, with the workers in Flint, for example, losing a total of one million dollars a day during the more than 40 days of the strike. Facing them all was the agonizing question of what to live on further. Their enemies in the plant management, the board of directors, the bourgeois press, the houses of Congress, state legislatures, and reactionary organizations carried on an aggressive anti-labor campaign of vilification and intimidation. The corporations, including General Motors, purchased weapons and infiltrated the labor organizations with a network of agents and informers.

Labor unrest continued in 1937. Almost two million workers in various industries were involved in 4,700 strikes. The striking auto workers were in the forefront. Detroit, Cleveland, Toledo, Norwood, Kansas City and Atlanta were the major centers of strikes against the auto companies—General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and others. Flint, Michigan, where the board of directors of General Motors sat, became the most famous sit-down strike center. In the very first days of the strike, labor organizers and activists from Detroit, Toledo, Norwood and other cities came to help their brothers in Flint. An active role was played by women's brigades both formed in Flint and coming from other places. A very important factor in the successful development of the strike was the leadership given by the C.I.O. and a number of large A.F.L. industrial unions.

The Communist Party was an influential force in supporting the mass struggle of the auto workers and their union. One of the main leaders of the strike in Flint was Wyndham Mortimer, a Communist and vice-president of the auto workers' union. Together with other agitators and strike organizers, he carried on extensive educational work among the workers' families as he organized a leading group. Other strike leaders were such widely known Communists as Robert Travis at Fisher Body Plant No. 1, Walter Moore, the Party organizer in Flint, William Wein-

stone, the Party's district organizer in Michigan. Many Communist strikers helped in the collection of money and food, and spoke at meetings. The *Daily Worker*, whose total circulation was 150,000 copies, put out regularly a special 25,000-copy edition. Correspondents kept the readers of their newspapers and magazines informed about the course of the struggle, reporting the aims, character and methods of the sit-down strikes. Strike problems were also discussed in special shop papers published in Cleveland. The Communists regarded them highly as a form of the strike struggle, and through them exposed the lies about the strikers that were being widely spread by the enemies of the working class.

Among the active strike participants and organizers were Socialists, many of whom were on strike committees. The Socialists continued to publish their well-known *Socialist Call*, which widely covered the struggle of the auto workers and their sit-down strikes. During the tense days in Flint, Communists and Socialists established cooperation on many questions. The Com-



17. National Guardsmen attacking striking auto workers in the outskirts of Toledo, Ohio, 1937



munist journalist George Morris, and a number of other Communists participating in the strike maintained close contact with the Socialists. Both Communists and Socialists were with the strikers in the workshops, courageously challenging the company and local reactionaries. Communists and Socialists along with militant workers made up an influential left wing. Saul Alinsky, author of a book about John L. Lewis, emphasized the important role played by the progressive forces during the sit-down strikes against General Motors in Flint.

Sit-down strikes became an increasingly popular form of struggle. In November 1936, they spread to Chrysler, Bendix and Briggs plants. The number of workers involved continued to grow, especially after the success of the sit-down strikes at Briggs and at the Midland Steel and Kelsy Heights plants in Detroit in December 1936. By January 1937, almost 45,000 General Motors workers were involved in sit-down strikes.

The companies turned off their heating systems in the plants hoping thus to force the workers out of the workshops. The police used tear gas in efforts to smoke them out. The reactionary press and representatives of the monopolies slandered the strikers and called on the federal and state authorities to use force against them. When General Motors demanded for a second time that Governor Frank Murphy of Michigan send the National Guard into Flint, the workers at a Chevrolet motor building plant wired the governor: "We have decided to stay in the plant. We have no delusions about the sacrifices which this decision will entail. We fully expect that if a violent effort is made to oust us many of us will be killed. Unarmed as we are, the introduction of the militia, sheriffs or police with murderous weapons will mean a blood bath of unarmed workers."<sup>1</sup>

Neither Roosevelt nor Murphy gave in to the demands of the reactionaries to use force. They realized full well what consequences such a step could entail. They also took into account the fact that the Democratic Party, and the President and Governor themselves, would lose the prestige they had gained in the struggle for a New Deal in labor policy. This fact and the libe-

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Walsh, *C.I.O. Industrial Unionism in Action*, New York, 1937, p. 123.

ral line taken by the Roosevelt administration clearly illustrated what Lenin had to say about the bourgeoisie and its two systems of governing, the two methods of protecting its interests which it may use alternately at different times—coercion or liberalism.

The General Motors workers stood their ground. Their demands were just, progressive public opinion came out strongly against the company, and ultimately the workers won out. General Motors had no alternative but to recognize the United Auto Workers union and sign a contract with it. The signing took place on February 11, 1937. The workers had demonstrated their enormous potential for struggle, their unity and solidarity.

The significance of the General Motors strike was great: it ranks with such major events in the class struggle as the general steelworkers' strike in 1919 and the seamen's and longshoremen's strike in San Francisco in 1934. It was the main battle of the second half of the 1930s.

In the meantime, the 85,000 workers at the Chrysler plants continued their struggle. The auto workers were among the unions supporting the C.I.O. However, the employers refused to recognize the authority of the C.I.O. even though it still remained within the A.F.L. Through the N.L.R.B. the auto workers' union won the right to hold a referendum, the results of which were in its favor. The company was compelled to negotiate and conclude a collective contract with it.

After the February 1937 victory of the auto workers in Flint, more than 41,000 workers participated in sit-down strikes to win collective agreements with their employers. Strikes spread to the aviation industry, where the auto workers' union was also endeavoring to draw the aircraft workers into its ranks. One strike, for example, was against the Douglas aircraft company in Santa Monica, California. In March 1937, almost 200,000 workers employed in 247 plants in various states were involved in sit-down strikes.

Such was the progress of the movement for industrial unionism. The working class of the United States was on the rise, with millions of workers eager for organization.

At the time of the sit-down strikes in Flint and elsewhere, voices were raised in both houses of Congress about a "Red

menace" and "communist plot". Many of the congressmen who delivered malicious anti-labor speeches saw visions of a forcible overthrow of the U.S. government and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. This myth was deliberately spread to justify the campaign of vilification and persecution of the new industrial unions. In the focus of this propaganda was the Committee for Industrial Organization, which was called a "branch of the Communist Party", a "flying squadron" fomenting disorder and organizing strikes, a "foreign agent", a "subversive, un-American machine", etc.

It was a rare day in Congress when poisonous speeches were not delivered there by enemies of Roosevelt's New Deal. Republicans Clare Hoffman, Martin Dies, Everett Dirksen and John Rankin became notorious during this period as they heaped calumny upon the industrial unions, their leaders and the Communist Party. They took pains to protect the image of the A.F.L.'s top leadership and, swearing by their sympathies with labor, referred to the C.I.O. with malicious sarcasm. Senator Harrison, for example, said at one point: "I have voted with labor throughout my 26 years of service. I have respect for William Green. I had great respect for Samuel Gompers. I respect the American Federation of Labor. I do not know anything about the C.I.O. I just do not understand it; that is all. I have not had time to do so. Perhaps I may understand it in time."<sup>1</sup> Senator Lewis, Congressman Woodruff and many others came out with similar eulogies to Gompers and Green.

Such legislators really did not and could not understand the interests of ordinary workers who were striving to unite in order to withstand the monopolies' never-ending offensive. However, they all understood the fundamental difference between the concepts and tactics of the Gompersites and the left-wing figures in the C.I.O. Senator Woodruff, for example, stressed that the A. F. L. remained true to the ideals and philosophy of Samuel Gompers. Unlike the A.F.L., the Committee for Industrial Organization proceeded from the need to draw into its ranks broad sections of the workers, to rely on their activity and

help the development of a more democratic course for the labor movement.

However, even these quite limited goals, which wholly fit into the framework of bourgeois democracy, aroused the ire and dissatisfaction of the rightist elements in the power elite. The mass character of the movement and some of the more effective means of struggle such as picketing, demonstrations and especially the sit-down strikes, evoked fear and anxiety in the ruling class and among its servants. It was no accident that reports about the sit-down strikes in Michigan caused a commotion in the Capitol. Since the strikes were conducted by the industrial unions, the reactionary legislators vented their rage against the C.I.O. and the Communist Party. "The most ominous thing in our national economic life today is the sit-down strike," said Congressman Johnson of California.<sup>1</sup> The sit-down strike, maintained Congressman Michener of Michigan, destroyed property rights, and added that "to destroy property rights means to destroy our system of government".<sup>2</sup> One of the more active hard-liners, Representative Hoffman of Michigan, defined the sit-down strike as a "rebellion against authority of State and Nation".<sup>3</sup> Congressman Shafer of Michigan said that the sit-down strike "degenerates into senseless violence, lawlessness, mob disorder".<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, Hoffman and others of his mindset called for reprisals against the "rebellious mob". They demanded that Roosevelt and Governor Murphy put an end to the "usurpation of property". Hoffman expressed displeasure with the fact that "the Commander of the Army and Navy does nothing to protect them [owners and monopolists like Henry Ford.—*Auth.*], nor does he call upon the Governor of the state to extend the protection guaranteed by the law of the land".<sup>5</sup> The hard-line legislators painted a dark picture of the C.I.O., accusing it of attempting to change the American political system. Hoffman decla-

<sup>1</sup> CR, July 30, 1937, p. 7873.

<sup>1</sup> CR, March 17, 1937, p. 2337.

<sup>2</sup> CR, January 26, 1937, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> CR, March 22, 1937, p. 2560.

<sup>4</sup> CR, April 19, 1937, p. 3605.

<sup>5</sup> CR, January 18, 1938, p. 733.



red that the C.I.O. was consumed with the desire to subvert the A.F.L. and overthrow the Government of the United States. Monexistent "conspiracies" and "plans" to seize the American continent with the help of the Comintern were ascribed also to the Communists. This torrent of fabrications was calculated to frighten the American public, and to set it against the industrial unions.

The anti-labor hysteria whipped up by the extreme reactionary elements in Congress could hardly come as a surprise. What was surprising, however, was the position taken by the A.F.L. leaders. Wrote Green: "The sit-down strike has never been approved or supported by the American Federation of Labor because there is involved in its application grave implications detrimental to labor's interests."<sup>1</sup> The most dangerous threat, in his words, was the "illegal seizure of property" which, he said, "the public will not long tolerate". Further, he declared: "I therefore publicly warn labor against this illegal procedure. Both personally and officially, I disavow the sit-down strike as a part of the economic and organization policy of the American Federation of Labor."<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, what was more important to Green and his cronies was to maintain respectability and to act cautiously, avoiding any sharp class confrontations. Of the things Green said, what particularly draws our attention is his condemnation of the sit-down strike as an "illegal procedure". This is ironic in view of the illegal and unseemly methods of struggle Green and his closest advisors used themselves, as A.F.L. documents emanating from Green's office bear witness to.

Reference here is to the correspondence of John Frey, one of the A.F.L. leaders closest to Green. For many years he headed the influential metal workers' department, under which came numerous A.F.L. unions in the metals industry. He was personally close to the A.F.L. president on the executive council. The main features of Frey's political profile were anti-communism and hatred of the C.I.O. A study of Frey's documents reveals many aspects of the activity of Green, Woll, himself and other prominent leaders of the A.F.L.

<sup>1</sup> CR, March 29, 1937, Appendix, p. 3664.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

On August 14, 1938, the readers of *The New York Times* learned that John Frey had testified on behalf of the A.F.L. before the House Un-American Activities Committee, headed by Congressman Martin Dies, concerning the "infiltration" of "Reds" and Communists into the C.I.O. For three days in a row he had described their "intrigues" and "plots". According to his calculations, there were 284 Communists in the leadership of the C.I.O. Progressive forces assessed his actions as an A.F.L. betrayal of the C.I.O., by now a mass organization.

Frey's correspondence irrefutably testifies to the fact that the A.F.L. office did everything to conceal from the public that Frey had created a whole espionage network of informer-agents in the labor movement. Figuring most often in this shameful correspondence were J. H. Zumwalt, James E. Cassidy, and G. H. Syrl. Some were officially employed as A.F.L. labor union functionaries, but secretly carried out altogether different functions, while others worked in other capacities but were closely linked with Frey by mutual information. Green and his associates in the A.F.L. not only knew about this correspondence but also participated in it.

The A.F.L. office not infrequently received the most absurd "information", such as reports that the Communist Party and the C.I.O. were seeking to destroy the A.F.L. Another contention was that the New Deal and Roosevelt's liberal legislation were the results of Moscow's intrigues. Tendentiously gathering and using this kind of "material", the A.F.L. leaders deliberately spread misinformation about the C.I.O., and outright falsehoods about the Communist Party. On May 11, 1938, the Associated Press carried a report about a speech made by Frey at a mass meeting in Los Angeles, in which he asserted that John L. Lewis was a "tool of Moscow", implying thereby that the C.I.O. had been created at Moscow's instructions and with "Moscow's gold". This ridiculous fabrication represented the official attitude of the A.F.L. executive council and William Green.

The C.I.O. responded with protest and indignation to the slanderous statements made by Green, Frey and their associates. On May 18, 1938, Adolf Germer, from the regional C.I.O. center in Detroit, sent a letter of protest to Frey. "You will agree," he wrote, "that such a statement should not be made in public unless there is a substantial proof to support it. Mere conjecture,

uncontrollable prejudice, and fanatical outbursts are no justification for a person of your responsibility and your 'intellectual standing' making such a serious charge."<sup>1</sup>

Germer wrote about the disdain shown by the A.F.L. leaders to the interests of millions of semiskilled and unskilled workers and their reluctance to accept them into labor unions, and added that the Committee for Industrial Organization and its leader John L. Lewis were doing for the workers what the leaders of the A.F.L. did not wish to do. He wrote further: "Whoever supplied you with your information led you down a blind alley. Besides, the part played by the A.F.L. officialdom in that campaign should cause your face to turn red with shame at every thought or mention of it."<sup>2</sup>

The A.F.L. informers kept an eye on C.I.O. activists, wrote reports on them, branded them as Communists and sent all this to Green's and Frey's office. Some officials of local A.F.L. organizations even sent queries to the Federation's headquarters in Washington, D.C., about whether X or Y were Communists. Frey replied promptly if he had "data" on them in his huge files. If he hadn't, he sent requests to his spies to gather data on X or Y. One of Green's informers admitted on one occasion: "I have acceded to every request that Mr. Green made me, and therefore he had the matter before him in full. As to his examining the material I have several thousand pages of records of tapped meetings of the Communist Executive Committee."<sup>3</sup>

Frey indiscriminately pinned the Communist label on many C.I.O. union functionaries who had no relationship whatsoever to the Communist Party and never interested themselves in the ideals of the Communists, being content with the specific aims of day-to-day union work. As already noted, Frey testified publicly before the House Un-American Activities Committee, as a result of which he frequently received letters of protest accusing him of slander.

<sup>1</sup> Library of Congress, John Ph. Frey Papers, Container 7, Folder 105, Adolf Germer to John Ph. Frey, May 18, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Library of Congress, John Ph. Frey Papers, Container 7, Folder 105, James Cassidy to John Ph. Frey, January 15, 1938.

In the course of strikes, large industry-wide workers' associations were forged out of local shop and plant labor organizations. It was a dynamic process of the birth and development of new labor organizations based on the industrial principle. The strikes in the auto industry were only one vivid example of American workers fighting for their class organizations.

We have shown here the movement of the seamen, longshoremen, steelworkers and auto workers as the most active groups involved in the general proletarian struggle for the creation of democratic labor unions. The actions taken by the workers in these industries were not isolated. They were closely linked with the struggle of workers in other industries. Underlying their concerted efforts were unity and solidarity, engendered by their common interests and goals.

Workers in the consumer goods industries and services field were also actively involved in the strike struggle. They included textile, clothing, fur, leather and shoe workers, furniture makers, carpenters, teamsters, workers in the food and tobacco industries, laundry workers, hotel and restaurant employees, and wholesale, retail and department store clerks. The strikes in which these categories of workers were involved were not as massive or as prolonged as those in, say, the auto or steel industries. But they were numerous and spread over a large part of the country, and completed the overall picture of the strike struggle in industry as a whole.

Taking an active part in the strike movement were the textile workers. According to the data of the clothing workers' union, there were over 1,250,000 workers in this field.<sup>1</sup> Almost half of them were women.

The textile workers were in a low-paid worker category, with an average wage of \$14 a week. Only at the woollen mills did it go up to \$18 a week. The workers sought to improve their economic position by uniting into industrial unions. In a letter dated May 28, 1936, the president of the union, Thomas F. McMahon reminded William Green that a convention of his union in August 1934 had unanimously passed a resolution approving the industrial form of organization. The convention

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the General Executive Board to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, 1936-1938, Atlantic City, 1938, p. 55.*



had instructed the union leadership to promote educational work among the workers, and the union thereupon launched an organizing drive.

In 1936, it already had 100,000 members and was one of the first C.I.O. organizations. In March 1937, it took an active part in the creation of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee (T.W.O.C.). Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers was elected chairman. Six representatives of other unions were also on the Committee. The textile workers' union contributed to the fund for the organizing campaign.

The T.W.O.C. sent 600 organizers into the South. Many of them were members of the clothing workers' union. During the drive, textile workers by the thousands joined local units of the T.W.O.C. In the summer of 1937, 70,000 joined the ranks of the T.W.O.C. locals. The Committee already had agreements with the 150 textile mills and now undertook extensive work in the South.

The owners of mills and cotton plantations tried to block the C.I.O. But even so, the T.W.O.C. succeeded in concluding contracts in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia and Massachusetts. The contracts covered only 6,000 workers. In the South, of the 29 referendums held by the T.W.O.C., 26 involved 35,000 textile workers, and most of them were in favor of joining the Committee.

The strike struggle was widespread also in the clothing industry, where there were two separate industrial unions with a total of about half a million members. Both of them had considerable influence on the whole movement for industrial labor organization. Sidney Hillman stood at the head of one (the Amalgamated Clothing Workers), and David Dubinsky headed the other (the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union).

Most of the clothing and ladies garment workers were poorly paid and their standard of living was low, which served as an impetus for mass strikes. The International Ladies Garment Workers conducted 1,855 strikes between March 1938 and January 1940, of which 1,839 were successful. Almost half of these strikes were called to gain employer recognition of the union; the others were prompted by employers' violations of

contracts. Thousands of workers poured into new locals that sprang up in the course of the strike struggle. The membership of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers also grew rapidly. At the union's twelfth biennial convention in Atlantic City in May 1938, Hillman announced that membership had grown by 75,000 in the preceding two years.

Meanwhile, a struggle for collective bargaining was being waged by workers in the furniture, fur and leather industries, hotel and restaurant employees, and federal employees.

In February 1938, the Furriers Association in New York announced a lockout of 2,000 workers. All union demands that the workers be reinstated were rejected. In response, the union called a general strike on March 31. At that time, some 14,000 workers were employed at the fur factories in New York. Their average weekly wage in 1937 ranged between \$23 and \$25. The union demanded a re-examination of the production quotas and hourly wage rates, and a new contract. The strike lasted for two months, but in the end the union won a new three-year contract under which the minimum wage was increased by \$2 to \$6 a week with the same 35-hour week as before.

The result of the struggle of the shoe and leather workers was the creation of the United Shoe Workers of America. On March 16, 1937, 16,000 workers decided to unite into a single organization. After that, small unions and groups of shoe workers in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Rochester, New York, and Chicago began to merge. The result was that by May 1938, membership of the shoe workers' union had increased to 50,000.

The shoe workers were fighting not only for the creation of their union, but for the right to bargain collectively. In New York, for example, their union succeeded in winning a collective contract with twelve shoe firms, under which the workweek was reduced from 45 to 40 hours, and wages were increased from \$6-\$7 to \$12 a week.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the strike movement for collective bargaining, union recognition and organizing the unorganized became an important stage in the history of the American working class. The

<sup>1</sup> C.I.O. News, March 19, 1938.

fight of the urban workers for industrial unions had an impact on the movement of the agricultural proletariat.

In the second half of the 1930s, the strike struggle and union activity were centered on the fruit and vegetable farms, and, though somewhat less, the cotton farms of California, the beet plantations in the Rocky Mountains region, the cotton plantations of Arizona and the southwestern part of the old cotton belt, the fruit and vegetable farms of New Jersey and other states of the north and northeast, and some large fruit farms of the southeastern states, especially in Florida.

Under the leadership of Communists and other radical elements, industrial unions of agricultural proletariat were formed in all these regions. Most often they were unconnected with each other, but despite their varied and scattered character, there was much in common among the isolated organizations of the rural poor throughout the country. Spontaneously, the workers in different states advanced common demands — to put an end to poverty and the practice of driving workers from the land, to protect civil rights, and to create a national labor union within the framework of the A.F.L. The last was the key point, for experience showed that workers could win gains only through organization. But there existed formidable obstacles which on more than one occasion had nullified the first successes in this direction. The very structure of agriculture, especially the labor employment conditions, created colossal difficulties: it was almost impossible to organize permanently-employed workers scattered by two and three to a farm far away from each other. To a large extent this applied also to seasonal workers. It was easier to form unions in the big centers where labor power was concentrated, such as the California valleys, the Rocky Mountain beet farms, the Seabrook Farm in New Jersey, and the southern plantations. It was in these regions that the greatest progress in organizing workers was achieved. But there the situation was complicated by the fact that as a rule the workers were migrants, often changing their place of residence, rarely having a job and unable to pay even negligible dues.

The unionization movement was seriously impeded by the mixed national composition of the proletariat in regions with the highest concentration of labor power. Artificially kindled national discord cancelled out the advantages offered by the

concentration of workers on large farms and plantations. The situation in California was particularly significant in this respect. The local authorities, plantation owners and big farmers incited in every way bourgeois nationalistic prejudices among the leaders of farm workers of Mexican, Philippine and Japanese origin, and thereby facilitated suppression of all working people during strikes.

A large share of the responsibility for the lack of organization among agricultural workers lay with the A.F.L. leaders, who refused to recognize as legitimate the radical unions that were formed in most cases with the active participation of the Communist Party and other left forces.

In 1935 began a new period in the history of the unionization of agricultural workers, an important feature of which was the desire for unity shown by organizations scattered in various states and their efforts to create regional centers and a national union. At the initiative of the Communists, a conference was held in January 1935, attended by 53 delegates representing T.U.U.L. and A.F.L. unions, independent organizations and groups of unorganized agricultural workers from 20 states. The main result of the conference was the creation of a National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers.

Strikes on farms and plantations were accompanied by the struggle to organize a single union. In the spring of 1935, at the height of the strike struggle, a number of conferences were held in New Jersey, in all of which resolute voices were raised for the creation of a national union. The agricultural workers' union of New Jersey sought to join the A.F.L. in order to strengthen its positions in the struggle against the employers and local authorities. It succeeded in affiliating with the A.F.L. only with great difficulty.

Guided by the National Committee for Unity, the agricultural workers' union of New Jersey gained wide publicity throughout the country. Its struggle compelled the New Jersey State Federation of Labor to take an interest in the plight of the farm laborers. The state federation submitted to the forthcoming A.F.L. convention a resolution calling for the creation of a National Union of Agricultural Workers.

In the summer and autumn of 1935, strikes organized by the Sharecroppers' Union of Alabama and the Southern Tenant



Farmers' Union took place on the cotton plantations in the South. The demands were for \$1.00 for every 100 pounds of picked cotton, \$1.00 a day and free housing for a 10-hour day, and a minimum unemployment benefit. Before long, the separate strikes overflowed into united action of impressive scope by laborers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

The plantation owners dealt harshly with the strikers. Mass arrests of strikers and murders of strike leaders were rampant in the Black Belt counties. The Sharecroppers' Union sent a telegram to President Roosevelt demanding a halt to the repression. The plantation owners terrorized not only the workers, but also those farmers who agreed to the demands of the strikers.

In preparing for the strikes, the two southern unions set up a joint committee to coordinate their actions. In the 1935 strikes, for the first time in the history of the Black Belt, whites and Negroes struck together in a united front. It was a time of actual unity between the sharecroppers' and tenant farmers' unions, thanks to which the strikers were able to score successes. During the strike, the tenant farmers' union organized 30 new units and its membership grew noticeably. The second convention of the union was held in January 1936, and was attended by 120 delegates from Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma. The report of the union's general secretary, H. L. Mitchell, indicated that in one year of struggle in cooperation with the sharecroppers of Alabama, the union's membership had grown from 2,500 to 25,000.<sup>1</sup>

In a special resolution, the convention approved the activity of the National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers and its newspaper. A unanimously adopted resolution calling for a farmer-labor party of the U.S.A. was added testimony to the growth of the membership's political activity.

California became the center of the American agricultural workers' strike struggle and union activity. A new wave of strikes in 1935-1936 involved mainly the Filipino and Mexican unions and native-born unorganized American workers. As a rule, these strikes were spontaneous rather than arising at the initiative of the labor unions. The Committee for Unity appealed

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, January 7, 1936.

to all agricultural workers, calling for joint actions. This agitation did not remain without results. A California State Federation of Labor convention, despite the resistance of the right-wing leadership, resolved to ask the A.F.L. to form a single union.

Under the leadership of the National Committee for Unity, organizations of agricultural workers in various states began to work for the creation of a single national union within the framework of the A.F.L. Agricultural Workers' unions at the time were either independent, that is, not affiliated to any labor union center, or had the status of federal A.F.L. unions. Local federal unions came directly under the A.F.L. executive council and had no connection with one another.

It was in the interests of the workers to convert temporarily operating federal unions into permanent regular A.F.L. organizations by means of granting them charters of a national or international union, which would also embrace independent groups. The 55th A.F.L. convention dealt with this matter as it considered three resolutions in favor of granting agricultural workers' unions charters of a national or international organization. The resolution introduced by the New Jersey Federation of Labor merits special attention. It proposed that no later than the spring the A.F.L. executive council call a national conference of farm, packinghouse and cannery workers' unions.

However, the editorial committee, headed by John Frey, altered the last and most important point of the resolution to read that the executive council would undertake a national campaign to organize all farm, packinghouse and cannery workers into A.F.L. unions as soon as possible. This vague wording gave the conservative leaders of the A.F.L. the right to determine how soon it would be possible.

With all its vagueness, the resolution played a certain role in uniting the scattered unions of agricultural workers in the various states. And through that resolution, the National Committee for Unity gained formal approval of its policy.

The year 1936 saw a growth in the number of strikes and in the membership of farm workers' unions. Farm strikes in California alone involved 13,000 workers, and most of these strikes were successful. Spontaneous actions were increasingly coming under the control of the unions.

At that time, a temporary Federation of Southern California Agricultural Workers' Unions was formed. It included independent organizations of Mexican, Filipino, and Japanese workers, as well as groups of native-born American workers. The nucleus of the Federation was the Mexican workers' union.

The new organization immediately joined the strike struggle. Particularly hard-fought was a strike on the citrus farms in Orange county, which to a certain extent marked a turning point in the history of class conflicts in California agriculture.

The California unions established contacts with a fruit and vegetable farm workers' organization in the Yuma River Valley (Arizona) which was operating very successfully and had won a collective contract with most of the employers in that area.

The biggest confrontation in California was a strike in the Salinas area, where about 5,000 lettuce pickers and packers stopped work. Many urban unions supported them.

Clashes on the plantations in the Black Belt also showed the urgency of creating a single agricultural workers' union. In the spring of 1936, 3,000 persons stopped work on the cotton fields of eastern Arkansas, demanding a wage of \$1.50 a day. Governor Farrell took direct charge of an armed struggle against the strikers, who were immediately subjected to such violence as night raids, bombings and destruction of churches where union members held their meetings. The authorities in the neighboring State of Tennessee showed complete solidarity in the armed suppression of the strike: they dispersed pickets on the state border and organized raids on the headquarters of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union located in Memphis. The working class, for its part, gave its full support to the strikers.

On June 11, the United Mine Workers' Union issued a statement of protest against the terror in Arkansas, demanding an immediate investigation into the terrorist actions of the plantation owners. The Socialist Party leader, Norman Thomas, strongly criticized President Roosevelt for refusing to intervene in the events in Arkansas, and said that in the cotton fields of Arkansas as of other Southern States slavery had not been abolished.<sup>1</sup> The union enjoyed the hearty support of the Com-

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, June 13, 1936.

munists. Communists were right among the strikers, and the Communist press reported all the details of the strike. On the whole, the strike was a success. Part of the plantation owners agreed to pay \$1.25 a day and to reduce hours.

But the strike also showed the weaknesses of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, whose leadership often relied exclusively on assistance from individual political figures and organizations who were far removed from the labor movement, while making no effort to establish ties with militant working-class groups. In particular, it pinned obviously unjustified hopes on the President's committee on farm rent headed by Henry Wallace, which had been set up in November 1935.

The National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers made efforts to promote the creation of a farm, packinghouse and cannery workers' union within the A.F.L. Six resolutions calling for immediate action to form such a union were introduced at the 56th A.F.L. convention. Struggle ensued over a combined resolution submitted by delegates from agricultural workers' unions in California, New Jersey, Florida, Colorado, and Michigan. The resolution was drafted by the National Committee for Unity. It exposed the ruinous effects of the A.F.L. policy with respect to agricultural workers and charged the executive council with refusing to carry out the decision of the 55th convention. The resolution urged that the convention instruct the executive council to call within six months a national conference of farm, packinghouse and cannery workers for the purpose of uniting them into a single organization affiliated with the A.F.L. as an international union.

The position of the A.F.L. officialdom was severely criticized by a number of prominent delegates, members of the Committee for Unity. In his retort, Green bluntly let it be understood that the executive council would grant a charter only to such unions as were financially self-sufficient.

The 56th convention merely passed a resolution condemning the discrimination against agricultural workers in federal labor legislation. The resolution was passed at the insistence of delegates from farm workers' unions of California, Colorado, New Jersey and Michigan.

There were 62 agricultural, cannery and packinghouse workers' unions in the A.F.L. In the event of their unification into a



single union, no less than 25,000 members of independent organizations were ready to join them. However, these 62 unions were denied a charter of a national or international union.

The 56th convention showed that there was no prospect for a single union to be formed within the framework of the A.F.L. Realizing this, the Committee for Unity began to work in contact with the C.I.O. Such a turn enhanced the prestige of the C.I.O. among the agricultural workers' unions, and delegates to many local and regional conventions spoke out decisively in favor of joining the C.I.O.

The National Committee for Unity proposed this idea to the C.I.O. The Committee leaders persuaded John L. Lewis to agree to it, and he gave them the go-ahead to carry out the plan they had worked out. In June 1937, the newspaper published by the National Committee for Unity issued a call on behalf of 44 A.F.L. and eight independent unions to hold a convention in Denver. The statement said that the successful and militant actions of the C.I.O. "cause us to seriously consider joining the C.I.O.". The A.F.L., and especially the California Federation of Labor, tried to frustrate this action, but the convention, nevertheless, took place. In attendance were 100 delegates representing fruit farm and cannery workers in the Far West, sugar plantation workers of the mountain states, sharecroppers and tenant farmers of the South, dairy and vegetable farm workers of the East, and some organizations of the Midwest.

The result was the formation of an international union called the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America. Almost unanimously, the delegates voted to join the C.I.O. D. Henderson of the Communist Party, who chaired the convention, was elected president of the union.

News about the formation of the international union was welcomed by farm and cannery workers, and by the end of 1937 the union had a membership of about 100,000.

The leaders of some independent unions looked upon the new union with mistrust. This was the attitude, for example, of rightist leaders of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, although they did concede that the members of their union were enthusiastic about the idea of affiliation with the C.I.O. In September 1937, an S.T.F.U. convention resolved to join the international union.

The new union's influence was strongest at the fruit farms and canneries of California, the sugar plantations of the Rocky Mountain region and in the Southern cotton belt.

With the onset of a new economic crisis, class conflicts in agriculture became sharper. The workers demanded better working conditions and union recognition. In February and March 1938, there was a big strike of nut shellers in San Antonio, Texas. The workers won recognition of the union as their only bargaining agent at all enterprises where most of the workers were union members, and an agreement from the employers that they would not discriminate against participants in the strike and would fire all strikebreakers. The police were obliged to release all the strikers who had been arrested. Under the agreement, the wage rate was to be finally determined by an arbitration commission, whose decision had to be handed down no later than 15 days after the agreement was signed.

Agricultural workers' unions of Arizona, which joined the C.I.O. in 1937, waged a successful struggle for their rights. In the spring of 1938, they organized a series of demonstrations of cotton pickers, demanding higher unemployment benefits.

From the second half of 1937, the activity of C.I.O. unions also grew in Florida, where successes alternated with failures. The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, now operating in the ranks of the C.I.O., remained the most influential labor union center in the South. As before, the rightist leaders, who put cooperation with liberal figures rather than class struggle in first place, had a negative influence on the union's activity. In pursuing their splitting activities, H. L. Mitchell and J. R. Butler had no scruples about resorting to the help of reactionary bodies, including the recently created Un-American Activities Committee.

Overcoming the many difficulties standing in the way of unification, the unemployed movement continued to develop. To be sure, not all differences were resolved, and from time to time there appeared groupings tending to oppose the mainstream. But the practical needs of the movement ultimately prevailed over the centrifugal tendencies, helping the participants to find a common language and work out a common program of action.

Signs of growing activity were increasingly in evidence in 1935. This was connected above all with a deterioration in the

administration of relief measures. The federal government persistently sought to shift onto the states the burden of assistance to numerous groups of needy. In accordance with a special presidential directive, from January 1935 the states took full charge of care for the aged and disabled. A study made at the time showed that the position of a significant part of the American people once again worsened sharply. Soon came an even more dumbfounding piece of news: the government had decided that on December 1, 1935, it would stop direct relief to the unemployed altogether.

A new element in the movement was the rise of associations of unemployed led by reformist leaders who had previously held a wait-and-see position. At a convention in early March 1935, Socialist-led organizations of unemployed formed themselves into the Workers' Alliance of America. At first, the Alliance in every way stressed its autonomy. But gradually the desire for unity and joint actions with more radically inclined associations became manifest in its ranks. The Workers' Alliance considered its task to be to work for a broad system of federal unemployment relief, unemployment insurance and better working conditions on public works projects. On August 17, 1935, responding to the call of the Workers' Alliance, hundreds of thousands of unemployed demonstrated in support of this program.

In January 1936, the executive committee of the Workers' Alliance made a number of important decisions. It came out in support of the Social Security Act, passed a resolution to merge with the unemployed councils, and decided to call a unity convention in Washington under the slogan of struggle for the rights of workers and farmers.

At the end of February 1936, the unemployed councils and the Workers' Alliance jointly organized a big demonstration of unemployed in New York. And the March 1, 1936 issue of *Workers' Alliance*, announced the unification of the Workers' Alliance and the movement headed by the National Unemployed Council.

The second convention of the Workers' Alliance (April 1936) discussed the problem of uniting all forces fighting to improve the economic situation of the unemployed, for social security, and against the attempts of reactionaries to wrest from the

working class whatever gains it had already won. The president of the Alliance (David Lasser) pointed out at the convention that the scattered forces of unemployed were opposed by a united front of reaction. The most important result of the convention, he said, would be its ratification of an agreement to unite the Workers' Alliance, the National Unemployed Council, the National Unemployed League and other groups.

The political section of the Declaration of Principles approved by the new organization of unemployed spoke of the need for workers and farmers to combine their political and economic might in order to win complete freedom, and of solidarity with any true movement for independent political action by the working class. The document expressed the organization's determination to fight for a new social system under which planned production serving people's needs would replace the existing chaos of production for profit.

Subsequently, the Workers' Alliance specified its list of economic demands. It included extensive development of public works under federal control, establishment of a guaranteed minimum wage of \$40 a month for everyone employed in public works, passage of the unemployment insurance bill introduced in Congress by Congressman Ernest Lundeen, a reduction of the workweek to 30 hours, and adoption of a special amendment to the Constitution of the United States on the rights of workers and farmers.

The Workers' Alliance's support of President Roosevelt in the 1936 election was not unconditional. A special document drawn up by the executive committee drew attention to the fact that the government had taken only half-measures in the fight against the national calamity, unemployment. It noted the inadequacy of unemployment relief, which no more than 5,000,000 unemployed, at best, could enjoy. Relief benefits never exceeded \$30 a month per family of an unemployed breadwinner, and in many places it barely reached \$6 to \$9. In November 1935, the federal government announced it would no longer offer direct relief, and placed the whole responsibility for it with the states. Consequently, the apprehensions proved to be not unfounded. As far as public works were concerned, no more than 4 million persons could get a job at the various construction projects, and their wages never exceeded \$20 to \$25 per month.



On the eve of the election, the Workers' Alliance put considerable pressure on the government by organizing a series of large demonstrations in defense of demands for new allocations for direct relief and the expansion of public works. Both the A.F.L. and the C.I.O. supported the initiative of the Workers' Alliance.

The process of uniting the various parts of the unemployed movement in the states under the aegis of a single organization was completed by the autumn of 1936. The Workers' Alliance scored another important success, this time in terms of gaining legal status. In an increasing number of states, the departments in charge of relief administration and public works and other local authorities officially recognized the Workers' Alliance as the only national organization of unemployed and public works employees that was authorized to represent their interests.

Roosevelt's victory in the 1936 election, achieved with the decisive labor support, gave rise to some hopes for extended and effective government efforts in the field of unemployment relief. But instead, rumors began to spread about an impending cutback in relief and public construction. Unfortunately, they proved to be well-grounded. Soon an official announcement was issued of a coming reduction of jobs on construction projects due to a proposed cut in the budget. The general stir this news caused in democratic circles threatened to spill over into open discontent. The Workers' Alliance did not restrict itself to verbal protests but immediately embarked on active struggle by organizing demonstrations, sit-down strikes and hunger marches. Labor unions in the large industrial centers (New York, Cleveland, Chicago) supported the struggle of the unemployed. The Chicago Federation of Labor wired Roosevelt and Hopkins urging them to halt the layoffs already begun in public works projects. The labor union center in Cleveland threatened to call a general strike if the layoffs did not stop.

On January 9 and 15, 1937, demonstrations of unemployed were organized almost everywhere. They served as a warning to the administration, the conservatives in Congress and wavering liberals who were close to supporting proponents of an economy regime to reduce the national debt at the expense of the most unfortunate part of the American working people. Yielding to pressure, President Roosevelt promised to seek ways and means to maintain the volume of public construction at the former

level. The administration apparently hoped that this declaration would quash plans by local branches of the Workers' Alliance to organize a march on Washington. However, the unemployed decided to help the government stick to the decision it had taken. About 3,000 demonstrators gathered in Washington, and on January 15, 1937, marched through the streets of the capital, vividly reminding its residents of the memorable days of the hunger marches of 1931 and 1932.

The leadership of the Workers' Alliance was not exaggerating in its assessment of the real state of affairs when it sharply criticized the government for the fact that the program it proposed did not meet the real needs of millions of Americans. In a personal talk with President Roosevelt, the president of the Workers' Alliance stated that the progress achieved in the years of the New Deal had been brought to naught by the extraordinary duration of the crisis and the interminable moral and physical suffering of the unemployed due to the meagerness of assistance they received from society. The Alliance urged the government not to reduce the jobs in public works and to raise the wages of persons employed on those projects by 20 percent. The Alliance leaders left the meeting with the conviction that Roosevelt intended to alter the administration's hard line and at least temporarily stop the cutbacks.

The signs of a new slump in the economy fully justified the call to mobilize for struggle which the executive committee of the Workers' Alliance addressed to the masses. The Alliance pointed out that the discrepancy between the rising cost of living and the sums provided for unemployment relief was growing constantly. In 1936 alone the cost of living had risen 12.7 percent, while relief outlays remained the same or even dropped. May and June 1937 were the months in which the fate of the representations which the Workers' Alliance had made to the government on behalf of millions of unemployed was decided. Not relying on Roosevelt's agreement to defend before an intractable Congress a figure of \$1.5 billion to finance public works, the W.A. organized mass demonstrations everywhere. First the House of Representatives and then the Senate agreed with the President's recommendations, which, in Hopkins' words, represented only the minimum of the necessary outlays.

The popularity of the Workers' Alliance grew, and its ties with

the mass movement to organize millions of workers into labor unions and in defense of the principles of labor union democracy became stronger. In a matter of one year, the circulation of the central organ of the Workers' Alliance more than quadrupled. In March 1937, the *People's Press*, had a circulation of 200,000, topping that of any widely-read labor paper. The Workers' Alliance came to its third convention considerably stronger than it was before.

The convention was held in June 1937, in the midst of anxious times. Industrial America was going through a period of sit-down strikes. The hysteria of the reactionaries was reaching its high point. The Chicago shooting of striking workers at the Republic Steel Corporation plants on May 20, 1937, showed what could be expected from the monopoly bosses blind with rage in the face of the growing labor movement. In Europe, fascism was testing its strength, bringing down its armored fist on Republican Spain. The W. A. executive committee's report to the convention drew attention to the specific features of the political situation, and defined the place of the organized movement of unemployed in current events. It expressed "solidarity with the courageous struggle" to organize the workers in the basic industries. We cannot, the report said further, formulate our program without taking into consideration the events in Spain, where our brother workers are fighting to defend democracy from the fascist hordes of Italy and Germany. Hundreds of members of the Workers' Alliance are already fighting in the trenches of Spain on the side of the Republicans. These events within the country and outside it will be of great importance to us, the unemployed and those employed in public works, and whenever we run into reaction, regardless of its source, we must always follow the slogan of struggle and add our voice to the great call of the entire working class: "No passaran!". The report called on the members of the Workers' Alliance to give all-out support to the movement for an independent working-class political party.<sup>1</sup>

The convention unanimously adopted a declaration of the principles and purposes of the unemployed movement, which outlined the movement's economic demands, including those

<sup>1</sup> See, *People's Press*, June 26, 1937.

for expanding public works, the adoption of a fully adequate system of social security, etc. Much space was devoted to general political issues. The document proclaimed the identity of class interests of employed and unemployed workers and called for unity in the struggle to achieve "full economic and political freedom" for all working people. It stated further that the Workers' Alliance dedicated itself "to an uncompromizing struggle against conditions that lead to the impoverishment of millions of people in the midst of plenty." The convention expressed the intention of the Alliance to subsequently join a farmer-labor party and came out in support of a most active struggle against war and fascism.

The general political trend of the Workers' Alliance made it part of the left wing of the labor movement: it did not restrict its activity to purely economic struggle, but actively supported progressive movements fighting for democracy, social change and peace. The New York branch of the W.A. was its largest and most influential unit. It supported the American Labor Party of New York, came out in defense of the Spanish republicans, and cooperated with the American League Against War and Fascism. The Workers' Alliance of Greater New York backed the most far-reaching of the New Deal reforms, stood up for the rights of Negroes, came out actively for the release of Tom Mooney, and gave its full support to the C.I.O. and the leadership of John L. Lewis.

After the convention, the W.A. concentrated its efforts on organizing a broad movement to prevent cutbacks in the public works program. During the convention itself, the decision had been taken to organize a new national march on Washington. On August 23, 1937, as scheduled, about 3,000 representatives of organizations of unemployed arrived in Washington. They remained in the capital about a week. But even before the marchers entered the city, the New Deal administration had made concessions: on instructions from the President, Harry Hopkins announced that not a single unemployed person would be refused a public works job until January 1938.

The position held by the leadership of the unemployed movement was not to give up the fight in the face of partial concessions by the government. The economic crisis of 1937 once again showed that this was the right tack. Thus, the New Deal



administration's benevolent gestures did not lead to moral capitulation or disorganization. On the contrary, the Workers' Alliance maintained its militancy and went into action as soon as, in the summer of 1937, the economic situation deteriorated. The W.A. offered to cooperate with the C.I.O. and helped in working out a single program of struggle against unemployment and its social consequences. In the spring of 1938, the government, yielding to public pressure, abandoned its plans to "economize" on the poverty of millions of unemployed, and returned to a policy of providing for relief funds through a budget deficit. A certain amount of farm surpluses were distributed among people lacking the means of existence. Under the Relief and Rehabilitation Act of 1938, appropriations for public works were increased, making it possible to provide jobs for more than three million unemployed that same year. This was a considerable increase over the preceding year when only 1.6 million were employed in public works.

From 1938 through 1940, the Workers' Alliance, side by side with the C.I.O. and other labor organizations, continued the struggle for material assistance and progressive legislation. Among its campaigns during those years mention should be made of the demonstrations of unemployed held on January 29, 1939, and the national convention of unemployed for the right to work held in Washington in June 1939.

At the close of the decade separatist tendencies made their appearance within the Workers' Alliance. In the summer of 1940, a sizable part of the organization, headed by its former president, David Lasser, who had sunk to positions of anti-communism, split away. But it was not only this that gradually narrowed the scope of the Alliance's activity. The shift of the economy onto a war footing and the beginnings of an industrial upswing played a decisive role in the disappearance of mass unemployment, and along with it of the mass movement of unemployed which had made an important contribution to the struggle for social progress in the thirties.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FORMATION OF THE CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS

In September 1937 there were 169 labor organizations in the United States. Of these, 103 belonged to the A.F.L., 31 were affiliated with the Committee for Industrial Organization, and 35 were affiliated with neither.<sup>1</sup> Most of the A.F.L. unions were in the consumer goods, construction, transportation and commercial fields. Most of the C.I.O. unions were in the manufacturing and mining industries.

Of the 169 organizations, 44 were built on a craft basis, 34 on an industrial basis, 89 were of a mixed structure, and 2 took the form of central labor unions.

Only 12 of the 103 A.F.L. organizations were industrial unions. Seventy-five of the 169 American labor unions were founded prior to 1900. Of these, 63 were affiliated with the A.F.L. This means that the bulk of the old trade unions, whose leaders were molded in Gompers' time, were in the A.F.L. Only eight A.F.L. unions were founded after 1930, as compared with 21 in the C.I.O. Of the 169 organizations, 20 had memberships of 100,000 or more each (9 in the A.F.L., 10 in the C.I.O. and one independent union). The largest of these was the miners' union, which had a membership of 600,000 in those years. On the other hand, 74 of the 169 had member-

<sup>1</sup> Carroll R. Daugherty, *Labor Problems in American Industry*, Boston, 1938, p. 350.

ships of less than 10,000 each. Of these, 49 were in the A.F.L., only three in the C.I.O., and 22 were independent.

In September 1937, 103 national unions had a total of 3,019,000 members in 28,700 locals. In October 1937, the C.I.O. industrial unions had a total membership of 3,800,000. This included, in the ranks of the 10 unions suspended from the A.F.L. alone, 600,000 miners, 525,000 steelworkers, 375,000 auto workers, 270,000 textile workers, 252,000 ladies garment workers, 180,000 clothing workers, 100,000 oil workers, 75,000 rubber workers, 45,000 iron miners and smelters, and 17,000 glass blowers. The combined membership of just these unions alone was 2,439,000. The remaining 1,361,000 members were in 21 other industrial unions. Among them the largest were the unions of electrical and radio, shipbuilding, woodworking, shoe, fur and leather, and transport workers, and the printers', longshoremen's, sales clerks', office employees', and federal employees' unions.

The A.F.L. leaders arrogantly pushed aside these millions of working people. Hence, these workers had no other alternative but to pour into the newly-created industrial unions through which they could defend their class interests. The leaders of the C.I.O., the leaders of some labor unions outside the C.I.O., and Communist unionists who shared this sentiment were compelled to steer a course toward organizing a second labor union center. They considered this imperative in the light of the proceedings of the 56th A.F.L. convention, during which all of the C.I.O. unions were expelled from the Federation.

The left-wing leaders considered it necessary, in this connection, to abandon the slogan, "For a United, Powerful A.F.L.". This was the logical result of the splitting policy of the A.F.L. leaders, headed by Green. The Communist Party denounced the line followed by the top leaders of the A.F.L. and urged the C.I.O. unions not to agree to any compromise with Green and his associates on their terms. As for the Socialists, despite their small numbers, their voices were divided for and against expulsion. The right-wing Socialists representing the Social Democratic Federation spoke and voted in favor of the executive council's expulsion resolution at

the convention. The delegates who represented the Socialist Party proper and came primarily from the State of Wisconsin, voted against expulsion. The Communists pointed at that time to the attempts of certain Socialists like Dubinsky to withdraw from the C.I.O. It was precisely when through the fault of the A.F.L. leaders the split occurred between the two big labor-union groups and their unification became impossible that Dubinsky tried to play the role of arbitrator, calling on Lewis to agree to a return of the C.I.O. to the A.F.L. Dubinsky voiced his disagreement with the position taken by Lewis and other C.I.O. figures. He claimed that the A.F.L. was prepared to make concessions to the C.I.O., but that the C.I.O. leaders were against unity. Dubinsky was looking for a pretext to return to the A.F.L.

The question of creating a second labor union center arose as soon as the mass C.I.O. unions were expelled from the Federation. However, determination to act in this direction did not come immediately. Many were still hoping to return to the Federation. It was no easy matter to take the decision to form an independent center, for the very idea contradicted the spirit of labor unity and solidarity. The C.I.O. leaders, Communist unionists and other left-wing figures made proposals to the A.F.L. for a settlement of the conflict under which the principle of industrial organization would be preserved within the Federation.

In April 1937, Green and Lewis met to discuss the possibility of reconciliation, but since Green demanded the disbandment of the C.I.O. organizations and their unconditional return to the Federation, the meeting was unproductive. The A.F.L. continued to accuse the C.I.O. leaders of dual unionism, separatism, of attempts to oppose the Committee to the executive council and of usurping power in the Federation. Hints alleging that John L. Lewis sought to seize the leadership of the A.F.L. appeared in the press and some public statements.

The tactic of discrediting one's opponents was not new. Whatever ambitions Lewis might have had, at that time he and the other members of the Committee objectively represented a broad movement of unorganized workers. For this reason they were guided by the interests of that movement, met it halfway,



and acted vigorously, boldly and efficiently. Considering these undeniable positive aspects of the leadership offered by the C.I.O. leaders, the Communist Party and most left-wing figures gave the Committee members all support and assistance. The Communists took part in many joint actions and cooperated with the C.I.O. leaders in organizing a broad movement of working people. Despite fundamental differences on important questions relating to the labor movement and the prospects of its development, the Communists considered it possible to go along with Lewis and his influential group within the framework of the drive for industrial labor unions. This was a fully justified tactic. Moreover, through its joint actions combined with criticism of the weaknesses of the C.I.O. leadership, the Communist Party sought to push the C.I.O. forward along a progressive, democratic road of development.

For his part, Lewis did not deny the right of the Communist Party to take an active part in the movement to create new democratic working-class organizations. He accepted the Communists' cooperation, gave heed to them, and took into consideration the Party's influence among progressive workers and intellectuals. Green and Co. and Lewis' political enemies in Congress used this as a pretext to accuse him of having "sinister ties" with the Reds and Moscow.

The industrial unions persistently and patiently strove for labor unity. An important step in this direction was the convening of a national conference of C.I.O. organizers in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on October 16, 1937. The conference addressed the 57th convention of A.F.L. held in Denver, Colorado, with a proposal to re-establish unity between the C.I.O. unions and the Federation. It suggested that the convention pass a resolution to call a joint conference to which A.F.L. and C.I.O. unions would each send 100 delegates.

A.F.L. convention ratified the executive council's decision to temporarily suspend the C.I.O. unions, and adopted amendments to the constitution under which the council could expel national and international unions, and the president could expel city centrals, state federations, federal unions or their officers or members, subject only to appeal at a subsequent

convention.<sup>1</sup> Under these conditions, the Federation would inevitably vitiate the proposal made by the C.I.O. conference. In its message to the conference, the convention demagogically stated its readiness to resume negotiations, while at the same time rejecting the proposal to hold a broad joint meeting. The C.I.O. conference discussed the A.F.L. message and agreed to a narrow meeting with 10 delegates from each side.

The conciliation commission met on October 25, 1937. The C.I.O. delegation was composed of Murray, Hillman, Howard, Martin, Dubinsky, Carey, Fremming, Quill, Curran, Fluxer and Potofsky. The A.F.L. delegation included Harrison, Woll and Bugniatet. The C.I.O. delegates sought unification with the A.F.L. on the condition that the industrial principle would be recognized for all the unions re-admitted to the Federation. The A.F.L. delegates insisted that craft unionism be retained as the fundamental principle of the Federation's structure, with industrial organization within the A.F.L. being allowed only in some cases. They also demanded dissolution of the Committee for Industrial Organization. It was clear that this proposal was aimed at reviving the former monopoly of craft federation in the labor movement. The C.I.O. and its unions could not accept it without violating their principles and betraying the interests of the workers.

It is important to note that at that crucial moment the Communist Party warned the C.I.O. and its unions against the dangerous inclination shown by some of their leaders toward compromise and agreeing to unification with the Federation on terms dictated by Green and Woll. The Central Committee plenary session in June 1937 stated that the attitude of the Communist Party to the question of unity had always been clear. It was determined by the need to wage a struggle with all available means against the splitting activity of the A.F.L. executive council, to preserve the unity of the labor unions and the support of all forces working to unite millions of workers into organizations of the Committee for Industrial Organization as the main organizational center of the American working class. It was clear that the Central Committee now felt that the only possible way to unite the labor movement would

<sup>1</sup> See, *Trade Union Facts*, New York, 1939, p. 23.

be through the creation of an independent center based on the principle of industrial organization. The statement further said that support of the Committee did not conflict with the policy of fighting for labor unity. On the contrary, only through such support would the unification of the labor movement become practicable.

The Communists and other supporters of the movement for industrial unions addressing labor meetings emphasized that a compromise on the A.F.L. executive council's terms would mean betrayal of the cause of labor.

The C.I.O. rejected the A.F.L. proposal, and on December 21, 1937, negotiations were broken off. On February 4, 1938, the coal miners', glass blowers', and miners and smelters' unions were expelled from the A.F.L. (without the qualification "temporarily"), and on May 2, the clothing, textile, oil, auto and rubber workers' unions and the S.W.O.C. were likewise expelled. The C.I.O. unions thus had no other way than to form a separate U.S. labor center for industrial unions.

The presidents of the unions associated with the Committee for Industrial Organization held a conference on April 12 and 13, 1938, in Washington, where in an atmosphere of enthusiasm the delegates unanimously passed a resolution to convene the First Constitutional Convention of the C.I.O. Hillman and Murray were selected to head the preparatory committee. They were also elected vice-chairmen of the Committee.

A number of other standing committees were set up at the conference. Among them were a committee on unemployment, headed by James B. Carey; a committee on workers' housing conditions, headed by David Dubinsky; and a committee on labor legislation, headed by Sidney Hillman.

The conference passed a resolution calling on workers to put pressure on Congress to approve a bill introduced by Robert Wagner, under which all corporations failing to comply with the directions of the N.L.R.B. would automatically lose the right to federal contracts, loans or grants. Another of the conference resolutions urged workers to join the movement for a law on a minimum wage and maximum workweek.

A 10-point social security program was adopted. The C.I.O. (still a Committee) was instructed to prepare a report to

Congress on unemployment in the country and larger appropriations for public works. This conference was a major step toward converting the Committee into an independent labor center.

After the conference, the Committee began extensive organizational and educational work in the labor unions in anticipation of the coming national convention. In new unions, elections of officers were held and the unions themselves formed state councils. This work enabled the Committee to see its strong and weak sides and to carry out elections of delegates to the national convention.

The First Constitutional Convention of the C.I.O. was held November 14-18, 1938, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Opening the convention, Lewis noted that in the 54 years of its existence the A.F.L. had been unable to do as much as the Committee for Industrial Organization was able to do in less than three.<sup>1</sup> Taking part in the convention proceedings were 476 delegates, representing 4,037,877 union members. The C.I.O. had 42 national and international unions, plus 675 small industrial unions with a combined membership of 123,265. It also had state labor councils in 23 states, and 164 district, county and city councils.

In the Committee's report to the convention, Lewis noted three periods, short but full of fight, in the emergence of the C.I.O. The first was prior to September 1936, when the industrial unions were still trying to organize unorganized workers through the A.F.L. During that period, the restrictions imposed by A.F.L. policy hampered the activity of the industrial organizations. It was then that a campaign was launched to enlarge the membership of the United Rubber Workers and local unions in the auto industry, and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee was formed.

The second period began after the suspension of the C.I.O. unions from the A.F.L. It was a time of rapid industrial union growth, when through a successful strike struggle by auto workers at General Motors plants was followed by an influx of unorganized workers into their union. At the same time, a

<sup>1</sup> See, W. Galenson, *Op. cit.*, p. 47; *Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the C.I.O.*, Pittsburgh, 1938, p. 9.



collective contract was concluded with United States Steel Corp., as a result of which hundreds of thousands of steelworkers poured into the ranks of the industrial unions. It was in those days, too, that the fierce struggle against Little Steel developed.

The third period began after the conference of C.I.O.-affiliated unions in Atlantic City in October 1937. It coincided with the aggravation of another crisis and the growth of unemployment. The C.I.O. unions faced serious trials during that period. The difficulties stemmed primarily from the monopolies' attacks on wages and their attempts to either abrogate or refuse to renew collective contracts.

However, the unions achieved successes during this time of trial as well. In particular, collective agreements were concluded with General Electric, Postal Telegraph, RCA Communications and other companies.

The convention discussed the question of relations with the A.F.L. and made the historic decision to establish the Committee for Industrial Organization as a permanent labor center, and as such to change its name to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.). The convention followed up its decision by adopting a constitution of the new C.I.O. On the whole, the constitution marked a great advance in the history of the struggle for democracy in the labor movement. In both form and substance it underlined the progressive character of the new labor union center. It designated the annual national convention of affiliated labor unions as the supreme body, which would regularly renew the leadership and effect control over its activity. The top executive bodies would be headed by an executive committee to be elected by the convention and meet twice a year. A president, two vice-presidents, a secretary-treasurer and an organizing director would be elected to handle day-to-day affairs.

Whereas the central bodies of the A.F.L. had the right to expel unions, the C.I.O. constitution did not vest such authority in its leading bodies. Only the national convention, by a two-thirds vote of its delegates, had this right. Another distinction was that the C.I.O. constitution gave considerably greater independence and autonomy to its constituent unions than did the A.F.L. It granted them rights and autonomy not

only in economic questions, which was true also of the A.F.L., but in political questions as well. This markedly distinguished the status of the unions in the two associations and opened up broad possibilities for activating local organizations at enterprises and in workshops. A prominent place was given to labor legislation. At that time, after two years of stormy debates and obstruction in the U.S. Congress, the struggle over a minimum wage and maximum hours bill had come to an end.

The convention adopted a number of other resolutions on organizational, political and financial questions. It passed resolutions concerning the C.I.O.'s attitude to fascism and war and with respect to U.S. foreign policy (discussed in the following chapter). In accordance with the constitution, the convention proceeded to set up the central leadership and the executive committee. John L. Lewis was elected president of the C.I.O., Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman became its vice-presidents, and James B. Carey its secretary-treasurer. The executive committee was formed of the presidents of the unions affiliated with the new center.

Workingmen across the country hailed the news about the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The days of the convention were a gala time for labor. The C.I.O. became a magic word for the American workers due to its unity, progressive militant spirit and democratic policies.

It was for this very reason, however, that the leaders of the A.F.L., headed by Green, received the news about the birth of the new labor center with mixed feelings of vexation and unconcealed malice. They had reaped the bitter fruit of their policies, and working-class public opinion saw them as the ones really responsible for the split in the labor movement. They had no excuses. The only logical move would have been for them to disentangle themselves from the situation they had created. But this, too, they were reluctant to do. Instead of seeking unification with the four-million-strong C.I.O., they continued to deepen the split.

In this connection, Green said: "No hostile employer in America has done the cause of labor more harm than those who fomented, executed, and administered the policies of the Committee for Industrial Organizations during the past 18

months."<sup>1</sup> One might rather say: "No hostile employer in America could speak of the C.I.O. with greater hatred than did labor leader William Green."

As far as the top officials of the A.F.L. were concerned, no three letters were more loathsome to them than "C.I.O.". Their entire practical activity connected with industrial unions was refracted through a prism of hatred. A sad example of this was their attitude to the Wagner Act and the N.L.R.B. Contrary to common sense, Green and his friends were disposed against the National Labor Relations Board. The A.F.L. accused it of partiality to the C.I.O. and of being its agent in the Roosevelt administration. One reason for this was that the A.F.L. usually lost out in referendums held to decide who would represent the workers as their collective bargaining agent.

Not surprisingly, this situation made the passage of new legislation in the spirit of the New Deal increasingly harder. In the three preceding years, the influence of a group of reactionary legislators had markedly grown in the Capitol. The labor unions and liberals in Congress encountered considerably greater opposition to new bills than was the case in 1935. This became particularly clear when one very important bill was making its way through the committees and houses of Congress. It was a bill on a minimum wage and maximum workday, drawn up by presidential advisors and known during the debates as the Black-Connery bill. On May 24, 1937, Senator Hugh Black of Alabama introduced the bill in the Senate Committee on Labor and Education, and Congressman Lawrence Connery of Massachusetts introduced an identical version of the bill in the House committee of the same name. On June 1, a long debate on the bill began.

The workers were vitally interested in the passage of this kind of law, and it was inevitable that the monopolies would fight against it. With the help of lobbyists, they organized obstruction to the bill. Some opponents of the bill declared that government interference in "free relations" between employers and employees was intolerable, that it had an awfully close resemblance to the system of relations in a totalitarian

<sup>1</sup> CR, July 30, 1937, p. 7908.

state. They argued that the passage of the bill would further centralize power in the federal government and insisted on transferring the functions of wage and hour regulation to the states. Proposals of this kind were made by Senator Martin Dies, chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and other congressmen. Some tried to picture the future law as an attempt to raise the standard of living of workers at the expense of the farmers, who would allegedly carry the burden connected with paying the difference to the workers. It is not hard to see that this kind of falsehood was aimed at pitting the farmers against the workers. This kind of argument was made, in particular, by Congressman John Rankin.

The intrigues of the numerous lobbyists working as agents of the monopolies in Congress put the bill in jeopardy. Billionaires like the Mellons, Rockefellers, Du Ponts and Morgans contributed large sums to finance these organizations and defeat the bill.

In December 1937, the House of Representatives voted 216 to 198 to send the bill back to the Committee on Labor for further study.<sup>1</sup> The bill was pigeonholed, although it required only insignificant amendments. Four months later, however, Committee Chairman Norton reintroduced the bill for congressional debate. Only a year later, in June 1938, did the dragged out debates end with a victory for the supporters of the bill. The House passed it by a vote of 314 to 97, after which it was sent to the Senate, where it also received a majority of votes. The report of the conciliation committee was approved by a vote of 291 to 89 in the House. The President signed the bill on June 25, 1938, and the law went into effect on October 25 of that year.

Section 6 (a) on "Minimum Wages", stated: "Every employer shall pay to each of his employees ... wages at the following rates—

"(1) during the first year from the effective date of this section, not less than 25 cents an hour,

"(2) during the next six years from such date, not less than 30 cents an hour,

<sup>1</sup> CR, January 7, 1938, Appendix, p. 270.



"(3) after the expiration of seven years from such date, not less than 40 cents an hour...."<sup>1</sup>

Section 7 (a) on "Maximum Hours", stated: "No employer shall, except as otherwise provided in this section, employ any of his employees..."

"(1) for a workweek longer than forty-four hours during the first year from the effective date of this section,

"(2) for a workweek longer than forty-two hours during the second year from such date, or

"(3) for a workweek longer than forty hours after the expiration of the second year from such date, unless such employee receives compensation for his employment in excess of the hours above specified at a rate not less than one and one-half times the regular rate at which he is employed."<sup>2</sup>

Section 12, on "Working Conditions for Children and Adolescents", forbade owners of industrial or commercial enterprises to purvey or sell products involving exhausting child labor. The Labor Department's bureau on child labor was empowered to make all necessary investigations and file suits against all violators of the law. A board under a special administrator was to be created within the Department of Labor to control the enforcement of the act. Provisions were made for punishing violators by a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment not exceeding six months, or both. Roosevelt appointed E. O. Andrews, formerly the head of the New York State Department of Labor, to administer the act.

This law, which became known as the Fair Labor Standards Act, was a serious gain for the American workers and their labor unions. The First Convention of the C.I.O. in November 1938 assessed it as a step forward toward economic security, helping to raise the purchasing power of American workers. At the same time, the very fact that the law was passed meant official recognition of the existence of a great mass of low-paid workers in the country.

In a radio address on May 9, 1938, Congressman Arthur Healey of Massachusetts revealed the limitations of the new

<sup>1</sup> *Compilation of Laws Relating to Mediation, Conciliation, and Arbitration Between Employers and Employees*, Washington, 1938, p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

law. He noted the fact that with a wage of 25 cents an hour with a 44-hour week, a worker could get only \$11.00 a week, or \$572 a year (52 workweeks). And this on the condition that he could find a job. Further, with a wage of 40 cents an hour, that is, beginning in 1944, he would be getting only \$16 a week, or \$832 a year.<sup>1</sup> It was not surprising that Senator James M. Mead of New York said in a radio address in New York on May 7, 1938, that 25-cent minimum wage was ridiculously low. But here, too, it should be kept in mind that only about 13 million workers, or one-third of all wage workers, were covered by this law. It did not extend to many millions of people employed in stores and other retail enterprises, the merchant fleet, transportation, canneries and on farms, or to office employees.

Such were the substance and character of the Wage and Hour Act. And such were the anti-labor sentiments held by a considerable portion of the members of the U.S. Congress in 1937 and 1938. The hostile forces in the legislature took an aggressive stance on any question concerning the labor movement. They sought repeal or re-examination of the Wagner Act. During this struggle, they were bent on abolishing the N.L.R.B., undermining Roosevelt's New Deal in general, and compelling the President to abandon his liberal approach in labor policy. As the trend toward repression gathered momentum, increasing influence was being gained by the faction of the bourgeoisie which preferred the language of the club to the more refined methods of liberalism in social relations.

What was surprising, however, was that attacks on liberalism came not only from the extremist circles of the bourgeoisie but also from certain elements in the labor movement. This manifested itself, in particular, in the increasingly hostile line pursued by the A.F.L. leadership with respect to the C.I.O., the Communist Party and other left-wing elements who expressed the democratic trend and against whom Green and those of like mind waged an untiring struggle.

The Roosevelt administration took a much more moderate attitude to the C.I.O. and showed much more interest in a unification of the two labor centers than did the leaders of the A.F.L.

<sup>1</sup> CR, May 12, 1938, Appendix, pp. 9012-13.

Roosevelt's messages to the A.F.L. and C.I.O. conventions had precisely that end in view. In the one to the C.I.O., the President said: "I venture to express the hope that the convention will leave open every possible door of access to peace and progress in the affairs of organized labor in the United States. If leaders of organized labor can make and keep the peace between various opinions and factions within the labor group itself it will vastly increase the prestige of labor with the country and prevent the reaction which otherwise is bound to injure the workers themselves."<sup>1</sup>

The more inevitable the world war and the closer the 1940 presidential election, the greater personal interest did Roosevelt show in a unification of the A.F.L. and C.I.O. A week before the January 1939 meeting of the A.F.L. executive council, he invited Green to the White House, where he told him that "the fight within the ranks of labor has gone too far and is creating a very disturbing situation economically, industrially, and politically."<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt wanted to determine what Green and his associates felt about the possibility of an A.F.L. and C.I.O. reunification.

The President's next step was to address a letter, dated February 23, 1939, to both sides, in which he suggested setting up an A. F. L. and C.I.O. council for the purpose of negotiations on unity. He said in the letter: "The complicated economic and social problems of today require the cooperation of responsible groups of citizens in all walks of life and the effectiveness of labor in this type of council can only be realized by its fundamental unity of purpose and program."<sup>3</sup>

Green appointed Harry Bates, Woll and Tobin to the council and warned them of the need to preserve the structure of the A.F.L. and the inviolability of the principles of its philosophy. The C.I.O. appointed Lewis, Murray and Hillman. On March 7, 1939, a meeting was held in the White House, in which the President and Secretary of Labor Perkins participated. The A.F.L. delegates showed no enthusiasm for achieving unity. On behalf of the C.I.O. Lewis presented a plan for unification. It called for

<sup>1</sup> Walter Galenson, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

holding a joint convention on June 1, 1939, in Washington, together with delegates from the Railroad Brotherhoods.

The purpose of the convention was to lay the basis for a new, united American Congress of Labor (A.C.L.), with an executive committee composed of an equal number of representatives from each of the three sides. The president of the A.C.L. would be a neutral person from one of the Brotherhoods. For one year, the Secretary of Labor would act as mediator in settling all disputes. In the interest of maintaining order, tranquility and mutual trust, the President of the U.S.A. would be asked to chair the sessions related to unification.<sup>1</sup>

Green and his supporters in the A.F.L. rejected this plan, calling it monstrous. In response, Lewis declared that the C.I.O. would never disband its unions, no matter how much that might displease the supporters of craft unionism.

Thus, the A.F.L.'s splitting activity scuttled all attempts at unification wherever they came from. In this case, too, the negotiations begun in the White House and continued in the Department of Labor were doomed to failure.

Moreover, the A.F.L. leaders were endeavoring to bring about a split in the C.I.O. On the eve of the war, their efforts along this line met with a certain amount of success. David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, decided to return to the A.F.L., where the established practices and traditions were more to his liking. Backed by his supporters, he succeeded in inducing the I.L.G.W.U. to withdraw from the C.I.O. As a result, in 1939, Dubinsky took with him about 240,000 organized garment workers. Almost simultaneously, Max Zaritsky, president of the hat workers' union, also quit the C.I.O. to return to the A.F.L., pulling a considerable number of workers with him.

This was a serious setback for the C.I.O. and a great loss to labor unity. It attested to the strength of the old conservative direction, the strength of the reactionary tendency, and the influence wielded by inveterate bureaucratic leaders.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Galenson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.



## CHAPTER XIX

PROGRESSIVE FORCES FIGHTING  
AGAINST WAR AND FASCISM

Barely recovered from the chaos of the early thirties, the capitalist countries found themselves in the second half of that decade facing the danger of a new crisis. There was a total of almost forty million unemployed in the capitalist countries in those years.

At the same time, the danger of a political crisis loomed in Europe. In Germany, the nazis were in the third year of their brutal rule, persecuting democratic forces and setting up concentration camps. In Italy, the fascists had for several years been crushing the democratic movement. The threat of war was hanging over the world.

Although by 1935 broad sections of workers began to sense the impending disaster, there was no unity among them. Even Communists and Socialists did not realize the imperative necessity of joint actions. They were at odds with each other, and their struggle weakened the left front of the international labor movement. As a result, on more than one occasion the reactionary forces were able to undermine the strength of worker organizations.

Moreover, unity of approach was lacking even in the ranks of the Communist parties and this was a serious impediment to mobilizing the masses for struggle against fascism, which had now become the number one danger. At that stage it was a choice between democracy and fascism. In the face of the growing danger of fascism and war it was in the interests of the pro-

letariat and the Communist parties to preserve and defend bourgeois democracy. In the preceding years, however, a sectarian attitude toward the problem of bourgeois democracy had taken root in the Communist parties of a number of countries. They felt that the proletariat should not fight for general democratic demands.

This approach made it difficult to establish ties with the non-proletarian masses. For this reason, in the new situation any underestimation of the necessity to fight in defense of bourgeois-democratic freedoms became intolerable and dangerous.

It was clear, therefore, that some of the tactical propositions set forth by the Comintern at its Sixth Congress in 1928 were out of keeping with the new conditions. The Communist parties needed a new political and tactical course that would correspond to the latest developments.

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern worked out such a new political line in the summer of 1935. It was the line calling for the establishment of a united front of the working class in the struggle against fascism. In their reports, Dimitrov, Manuilsky, Ercoli (Palmiro Togliatti) and Wilhelm Pieck formulated the ideological essence of the Communist parties' struggle for peace and democracy and against fascism and war. Fascism was defined as an "open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinist and the most imperialist elements of finance capital".<sup>1</sup> The Congress identified German fascism as the most reactionary variety of fascism and the main instigator of a new imperialist war.

To fight this menace, the Congress resolved that "at the present historic stage it is the main and immediate task of the international labor movement to establish the united fighting front of the working class".<sup>2</sup> This meant joint struggle to shift the burden of the consequences of the crisis onto the shoulders of the rich, a struggle against all forms of the fascist offensive, in defense of the gains and the rights of the working people, against

<sup>1</sup> *Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, Resolutions and Decisions*, Moscow, 1935, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the abolition of bourgeois-democratic liberties and against the approaching danger of imperialist war.<sup>1</sup>

A united front of the working class meant joint actions by workers regardless of their political views and trends, in contrast to the obsolete approach to unity only within the framework of communist principles.

The Seventh Congress urged all Communist parties to seek agreements with Social Democratic parties, reformist trade unions and other organizations of working people for joint actions against the class enemies of the proletariat.

Further, the Congress considered it especially imperative to bring about the establishment of a wide anti-fascist people's front on the basis of the proletarian united front. This was a broader task, going beyond the bounds of the labor movement of each individual country. It implied the need to forge nationwide unity of actions by workers, farmers, intellectuals and other anti-fascist forces and elements.

The resolutions of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International were aimed at suppressing fascist reaction, preserving world peace, defending bourgeois-democratic liberties, and blocking the offensive of the monopolies against the economic interests and political rights of the working people in the capitalist countries.

In view of the extremely tense world situation, the need for such a policy was urgent. A series of aggressive acts were committed in Europe, Asia and Africa. In October 1935, fascist Italy attacked Ethiopia. In Spain, the fascists were becoming increasingly brazen. A Popular Front was formed to counter them and in February 1936 was victorious in the parliamentary elections. On July 18 of that same year, with the direct assistance of Germany and Italy, the fascists engineered a mutiny against Republican Spain.

Fascist reaction was on the rise in France, too, where a plot against the republic was in the making. But there, thanks to the vigorous measures of the Communist and Socialist parties and other working-class organizations, an anti-fascist popular front

<sup>1</sup> See, Georgi Dimitrov, *For Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism*. Report Before the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, delivered on August 2, 1935, Sofia Press, 1969, p. 32.

was created in April-May 1936. The majority of Frenchmen voted in the elections against the fascists and reactionaries. It was a major victory for the forces of democracy.

In the Far East, the Japanese imperialist military clique provoked a conflict near Peking in July 1937, and expanded its aggression against China.

The world steadily approached the abyss of a second world war. Under the prevailing conditions, the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., Britain and France could have changed the course of events by taking concerted action on the basis of collective security. By common effort these countries could have cooled the heads of the fascist aggressors, compelling them to back down in the face of so mighty a coalition. Instead, the governments of Britain and France chose to play the role of "peace-makers" by making dangerous concessions to Hitler at Munich. Underlying their policy lay anti-Soviet objectives. They were more interested in Germany's fascist *Drang nach Osten* than in preserving peace.

As concerns the politicians in Washington, many among them were supporters of Chamberlain and Daladier and did everything they could to encourage them. Although some American foreign policy makers publicly denounced German and Italian aggression, in fact they supported a policy of non-intervention and appeasement. The covert aims of this policy were to help the spread of German aggression in Europe eastward and of Japanese aggression in Asia northward, without the U.S. itself getting involved in war and remaining in the reserve of the Western democracies. The German and Japanese actions were both obviously spearheaded against the Soviet Union.

It is not our goal here to examine all the details and frequent changes in U.S. foreign policy. The chief purpose of this chapter is to ascertain what the general attitude of labor was to fascism, war and U.S. foreign policy in the second half of the 1930s. What were the sentiments of the U.S. working class on questions of war and peace? What course did the major labor union associations—the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Railroad Workers' Brotherhoods—follow?

The Communist Party of the U.S.A. regarded the political situation in Europe and Asia as fraught with the imminent



danger of world war, and called the masses to fight the growing danger of fascism and imperialist war. It also stressed the American people's historic responsibility to struggle to preserve peace. At the same time, it soberly assessed the extent of the awareness and ability of the broad masses of working people in their struggle against war. The Party realized what tremendous difficulties stood in their way. Questions connected with the threat of fascism and war almost never disappeared from the agendas of the Communist Party conventions and Central Committee sessions in the second half of the thirties. The ninth Party convention in June 1936 devoted a great deal of attention to these questions. In its resolutions it emphasized the strength of the anti-war sentiments of the American people. The resolution on the second report pointed out: "We must face the acute menace of a world war. The overwhelming majority of the American people, the working class, the toiling people generally and all progressive forces are opposed to war and earnestly desire peace."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, as pointed out by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, it was important to take into account certain national conditions and features. For this reason, the Party convention noted: "...There still exists in these broad peace movements a great lack of clarity on how peace can best be maintained, which results in divisions and lack of unity of the forces of peace as against the forces of war."<sup>2</sup> One of the features characteristic of the peace movement in the United States was the strong influence of isolationism.

Isolationist propaganda was widely disseminated throughout the nation between the two world wars and had considerable impact on ordinary Americans and on the character of the peace movement itself. "Large masses of the American people," the convention stressed, "are still under the illusion that the way to keep America out of war is by 'isolation', by avoiding foreign entanglements', by keeping out of war affairs, by 'neutrality'."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, New York, 1936, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, p. 39.

The idea of passive protest against war and U.S. participation in it was especially strongly promoted by both Catholic and Protestant church organizations. A striking example was the mass-circulation newspaper, the *Catholic Worker*, published in New York since 1933. A small group of people, headed by Dorothy Day, united around the paper and for many years worked in defense of peace from pacifist positions. In May 1936, the paper wrote: "The *Catholic Worker* is sincerely a pacifist newspaper. We oppose class war and class hatred, even while we stand opposed to injustice and greed. Our fight is not 'with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers'. We oppose also imperialistic war. We oppose, moreover, preparedness for war, a preparedness which is going on now on an unprecedented scale and which will undoubtedly lead to war."<sup>1</sup>

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern attached great importance to drawing pacifist organizations into the ranks of a united front for peace. However, it made a distinction between "conscientious pacifists" and those pacifists whose policies serve to conceal the German fascists' preparations for imperialist war.<sup>2</sup>

The left-wing figures in the American labor movement, internationalists by conviction, criticized the views of the deluded conscientious pacifists and exposed the policy of those pacifists who deceived workers with Bible stories about a universal "brotherhood in Christ" and the Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." This approach to pacifist organizations constituted one of the major differences between the decisions of the Comintern's Seventh Congress from those of its Sixth Congress, where no distinctions were made between sincere but misguided pacifists and convinced propagandists of bourgeois pacifism. The latter held that it took a man of heroic stature to be a pacifist. But the way they saw it, to be a hero meant being ready for martyrdom, and this would involve protesting against U.S. participation in the war, evading military service in the event of mobilization, and deserting from the army, declaring oneself to be a passive martyr.

<sup>1</sup> *Catholic Worker*, May 1936, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Sec. *Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, Resolutions and Decisions*, p. 31 (in Russian).

Thus, pacifism in American conditions detracted the people from active struggle against fascism and the danger of an imperialist war. It confined their concern for peace within the United States and the American continent, leading thereby to the notion of isolationism. The isolationists always underlined that being separated by oceans from Europe and Asia the United States was naturally destined for a tranquil life without wars and conflicts. The administration and Congress should therefore avoid entangling their country in any conflicts, particularly wars.

The bourgeois isolationists asserted that the U.S. had been drawn into World War I through a misunderstanding, and that it was Wilson and those around him who were allegedly responsible. War for Americans could and should have been avoided. That mistake, they said, should not be repeated if a new war broke out. Let them fan the fires of war overseas, let Europeans and Asians kill each other, but we, Americans, will stay out and, at best, trade with the warring powers in arms, food, strategic materials and other goods.

It is not hard to see that this "philosophy" served the purposes of reactionary elements; moreover, having the U.S. remain in isolation waiting for the destruction by Germany of its potential allies was in fact in the interests of the fascist aggressors. Like pacifism, bourgeois isolationism was a deception of the working masses. No geographic frontiers could serve as a barrier to U.S. entry into a world war. Economic rivalry and the political ties among the countries involved and their mutual desire to get rid of their competitors would inevitably draw the U.S. into a world war. The essential difference between neutrality and pacifism, however, was that the proponents of neutrality saw it as a means of avoiding war until such time as it would be profitable for the U.S. to enter it, while the pacifists, using religious dogmas, came out against any U.S. participation.

Pacifism, isolationism and neutrality influenced the thinking of most Americans. And this was so because the protest against U.S. participation in war which underlay pacifism and isolationism was in line with the anti-war sentiment of ordinary Americans. For this reason, they thought that the best way out of the situation was to "keep America out of war".

The ninth convention of the Communist Party, while acknowledging the fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans were determined to "keep America out of war", pointed out that only a minority correctly understood that the only way to preserve peace for America was to prevent war in the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Comintern's magazine, the broad movement for peace was not homogeneous, since a significant part of the American people considered an isolationist policy, a policy of so-called neutrality, to be the way to maintain peace.<sup>2</sup> It further pointed out that many labor organizations in the U.S.A. backed the isolationist policy. In particular, it named the auto workers' union, which had come out with a demand to withdraw U.S. armed forces from China in order to guarantee U.S. non-involvement in a military conflict with Japan. This timorous position in support of an amendment to the U.S. neutrality act, the so-called Laddow amendment aimed at limiting the President's powers to declare war, was only to the benefit of the Japanese aggressor.

This restricted concept of peace for America only was a reflection of the influence of isolationist propaganda on the thinking of most Americans on questions of war and peace. Some Soviet historians who have studied the problem of American isolationism also find that isolationist sentiments were widespread. As historian E. I. Popova noted, "most American workers did not advance any foreign policy program of their own; poorly informed about international events, they accepted the assessments provided by official propaganda, and on the whole followed the bourgeoisie".<sup>3</sup> This constituted one of the big difficulties faced by the progressive forces, the Communist Party in particular, in their struggle for peace in the broader sense of the word.

The Communist Party was a persistent advocate of collective security as the only possible way to maintain peace. The struggle for collective security should have been a struggle for peace in

<sup>1</sup> See, *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Коммунистический Интернационал*, No. 4, 1938, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Е. И. Попова, *США: борьба по вопросам внешней политики*, Moscow, 1966, p. 101.



the broad sense, the main condition of which should have been cooperation among all non-fascist states. Peace is indivisible—this was the principal message of the Communist Party to the people. The ninth convention declared in its resolutions:

"We must convince the American masses, who are for peace, that war as well as peace is indivisible. We must show that while war is inseparable from capitalism, it is possible in the present world situation to keep this country out of war but only by fighting to delay, postpone and prevent the outbreak of the war prepared by the fascist aggressors. This means fighting for peace, world peace."<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, peace became an active factor—peace in the whole world. A militant rather than a pacifist or passive approach to the questions of war and peace meant "concentrating the blows against those fascist, militaristic and reactionary forces at home and abroad that today constitute the threat to peace."<sup>2</sup>

The Communist Party's main appeal to the U.S. government was, therefore, to preserve peace through collective security, the guarantee of which should be cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

However, the United States preferred a policy of neutrality to one of collective security. As later events showed, neutrality proved to be a political screen concealing the Munich sell-out that paved the way for war in Europe. The Communist Party leader William Z. Foster wrote at the time: "The only way America can keep out of war is by keeping war out of the world. At all costs, the American workers must help stop the approaching war by supporting the policy of collective security against the fascist aggressors."<sup>3</sup> A resolution of the Communist Party convention stressed the necessity of "collaboration of the organized peace forces in this country with the peace

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> W. Z. Foster, *What Means a Strike in Steel*, New York, 1937, p. 60.

forces abroad to support the peace policies of the Soviet Union, to combat the war-makers, to isolate them, and to check the criminal designs. Thus and only thus can the American people fight effectively to keep this country out of war."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the militant position of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. on the questions of peace, fascism and war. Holding to this position, the Party insisted on the need "to fight daily and systematically, and independently of capitalist governments, against the fascist war instigators."<sup>2</sup> The magazine *Communist International* said in this regard: "The policy of isolation helps only the fascists. It does injury to the interests of the American people, for it is this policy that will sooner or later draw the U.S. into war."<sup>3</sup>

What attitude did the other parties and the major labor associations take to this political line of the American Communists?

We noted earlier that the Socialist Party rejected the Communist Party's proposal for a united front in elections and in fighting for class goals. Although they recognized the growing danger of fascism and war, in practice the Socialists rejected joint actions by labor organizations and any kind of front with the Communists. A resolution of the Communist Party's ninth convention said: "The Communist party will work energetically for establishing united front actions with the Socialist Party and its organizations in the struggle for peace. At the same time we must point out systematically that the Socialist Party has not yet adopted a program of struggle for peace despite the fact that the membership of the Socialist Party is in favor of fighting for peace."<sup>4</sup>

The American Socialists were no exception. Like their counterparts in Europe, they failed to advance a realistic and militant program to mobilize the people for struggle against aggression and international brigandage. At its convention in

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Коммунистический Интернационал*, No. 4, 1938, pp. 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> *Resolutions of the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party*, pp. 48-49.

Cleveland, the Socialist Party, headed by Norman Thomas, again showed its opportunist essence with respect to both domestic and foreign policy problems. The ninth convention of the Communist Party emphasized this: "We must point out further that the present official position of the S.P., as established by the Cleveland convention, is a harmful mixture and compromise of isolationism, 'neutrality', counterrevolutionary Trotskyism, on the one hand and some genuine efforts by the Left for peace, on the other."<sup>1</sup>

The Socialist Party had many honest and militant members who sincerely wanted unity of working-class action in the struggle for peace and against fascism and war. It was with them that the Communists strove to establish contact. However, because of the resistance of the Socialist Party leadership, the Communists were unable to make headway in establishing a united front. Thomas did not conceal his anti-Soviet sentiments, and this was a stumbling block in recognizing the necessity for united-front actions of the peace-loving countries on the basis of the principles of collective security. Furthermore, the Communist Party denounced Thomas for his proposal aimed at continued U.S. strategic materials deliveries to the fascist countries. The Communist Party convention called this proposal by the leader of the American Socialists capitulation to the fascist aggressors.

In a report to the Communist Party convention, Robert Minor exposed the attitude of the Socialist Party to the question of a People's Front. At the Socialist Party convention, Thomas spoke against the idea of a People's Front, stating that circumstances for such a front did not exist, especially in view of Roosevelt's reform program. Minor quoted Thomas as saying: "Thank God such circumstances do not exist in the United States." In other words, Minor said, Thomas' attitude was, "Thank God that we have no People's Front government in the United States...."<sup>2</sup> Such was the attitude of the S.P. leadership, who apparently felt that support of Roosevelt's

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Robert Minor, *The Struggle Against War and the Peace Policy of the Soviet Union*, New York City, 1936, pp. 29-30.

bourgeois reformist program was in itself a kind of extreme left direction in the labor movement.

Nor did the Communist Party get any support from the A.F.L. leadership. There, the left democratic elements found themselves in no less difficult circumstances than the left-wingers in the Socialist Party, with this one essential difference: the influence of the A.F.L. in the labor movement was incomparably greater than that of the Socialists. The group of labor leaders headed by Green followed the old, traditional Gompersite line in foreign policy as they held fast to their hostile attitude toward the Soviet Union, international solidarity, the communist movement and the democratic trends and organizations in the working class of various countries.

Green and his lieutenants spoke from anti-war positions and their efforts seemed to be directed toward preserving peace. Delivering a report of the executive council to the fifty-seventh convention of the A.F.L. in Denver, Colorado, in 1937, Green passionately denounced the aggressive policies of the fascist countries in Europe. He said that memories of the horror of the world war and its victims were still too fresh in the minds of people, and urged that the lessons of history be drawn from this.

However, the leaders of the A.F.L. championed peace in word, but in deed fell in line with the Munichites who were obsessed with plans for destroying the Soviet Union and suppressing the democratic forces in the capitalist world. Green's speech made no mention of collective security in the broad and effective sense of the word. On the other hand, it was permeated with an anti-Soviet spirit and hatred of communism.

In declaring his opposition to communism, Green was using the same dirty devices used by the most vicious enemies of the U.S.S.R. Following in Gompers' footsteps, he was a fervent defender of capitalism. It was from these positions that Green propagandized his anti-war line. It was, in fact, isolationism and neutrality. Addressing the convention, he spoke against U.S. participation in any European conflict and in favor of continuing the policy of strict neutrality. He called on the U.S. Congress to consolidate the neutrality laws so as to



ensure the feeling of security in his country, which, he alleged, was dedicated to the principles and policies of peace.<sup>1</sup>

But such a peace could ultimately lead to world war. Green was only one of many who voiced this dangerous doctrine; he was echoed by numerous like-minded speakers, especially from the backward craft unions.

The A.F.L. convention's resolution on questions of peace and war spoke in the same vein, formulating an isolationist thesis concerning the position of the United States in the event of war.

On the eve of the war, the A.F.L. leadership backed the Roosevelt administration's policy of "neutrality", a policy which, as we know, led straight to the Munich policy of unleashing World War II. Of great interest in this regard is the question of the A.F.L.'s attitude to a speech delivered by Franklin Roosevelt on October 5, 1937, in Chicago, which drew broad response in the United States and abroad. The President noted the alarming fact that the international situation had further deteriorated as a result of the reign of terror and lawlessness instigated by aggressive forces in recent years. "Innocent peoples and nations", he said, "are being cruelly sacrificed to a greed for power and supremacy which is devoid of all sense of justice and humane consideration."<sup>2</sup> He explained further that America would not be able to avoid taking part in a new war, and that it could be attacked. "There is a solidarity," the President said, "and interdependence about the modern world, both technically and morally, which makes it impossible for any nation completely to isolate itself from economic and political upheavals in the rest of the world, especially when such upheavals appear to be spreading and not declining..."<sup>3</sup> Having in mind the state of anarchy and instability in the international situation, he explained to the American people that "there is no escape through mere isolation or neutrality". No matter what happened, "... the peace-loving nations must make a concerted effort to uphold laws and principles on which alone peace can rest secure".

<sup>1</sup> A.F.L. *Proceedings*, 1937, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times*, October 6, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Roosevelt continued: "It is my determination to pursue a policy of peace and to adopt every practicable measures to avoid involvement in war...." Remarking that "war is a contagion, whether it be declared or undeclared ... yet America could therefore not ensure itself against the catastrophic effects of war or the danger of involvement in war". In conclusion the President said: "...The will for peace on the part of peace-loving nations must express itself to the end ... there must be positive endeavors to preserve peace."<sup>1</sup> Such, in general outline, was the substance of the speech in which he proposed to "quarantine the aggressors". To a certain extent, it was a warning to Hitler Germany that the United States would not view what was going on in Europe with indifference, but would line up with all peace-loving countries and take collective actions (that is, actions with Western powers) against aggression and the threat of war. At the same time, it contained no call for a united front of all democratic powers *together with the Soviet Union* on the basis of the principle of real collective security.

However, even these limited collective actions without the Soviet Union's participation were not undertaken. Instead of the collective actions by the bourgeois democratic countries which Roosevelt had called for, what actually came about was dangerous appeasement, which objectively only encouraged fascist aggression. As a consequence, no quarantine was established. Even so, wide propaganda use was made of Roosevelt's speech.

How did the leaders of the A.F.L. react to Roosevelt's call for collective actions? In the executive council's report to the fifty-eighth convention, Green again urged the government of the U.S.A. to "pursue a policy of strict neutrality". A convention resolution reaffirmed the A.F.L. position of isolationism and neutralism, to which the Federation's officials added an anti-Soviet coloring. In a word, in 1937 and 1938 the traditional foreign policy line of the A.F.L. leaders remained unchanged.

The conduct of the leading figures in the C.I.O. in this area was incomparably more complex. Here, the influence of the

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, October 6, 1937.

left democratic forces and the Communist Party was more impressive. Although the C.I.O. leaders personally had conservative convictions, as heads of young and militant organizations they were compelled to reckon with the prevailing sentiment.

Unlike the A.F.L. leaders, Lewis and his associates in the C.I.O. were more cautious when it came to exposing their real views on such fundamental foreign policy issues as attitude toward the Soviet Union and the growing danger of fascism and war. Lewis showed restraint and avoided loud pronouncements. He stood at the head of the C.I.O. and this committed him to a great deal in those years, since that organization was a progressively inclined labor center. At the same time, this did not prevent him from implanting isolationist sentiments in the miners' union where he was the president. One of the organizers of the mass movement for industrial unionism, Lewis kept step with that movement since his actions were in line with the sentiments of the great mass of organized workers. However, in the foreign policy field, Lewis was an inveterate isolationist and shared the views of many American reactionaries. While fighting Green's clique in the A.F.L. to transform craft unions into mass industrial associations, he at the same time shared the views of labor reactionaries on foreign policy questions. This was one of the contradictions of Lewis's position as president of the C.I.O. Realizing this, he strove to pass over in silence the acute problems of peace, war and fascism. His views on these questions were close to those of the Republican isolationists, and, in general, he considered himself to be of their mindset, having completely broken with Roosevelt and the Democrats in 1937.

The left-wingers in the C.I.O., knowing how much influence the miners' unions and Lewis personally had among the broad masses of workers in the industrial unions, were wary of breaking with him and avoided criticizing him on foreign policy matters as long as he remained head of the C.I.O.

As for the leaders of the Railroad Brotherhoods, the materials of a number of their national conventions show that they eschewed discussing questions related to the international situation and other urgent problems of the times. Most often,

the conventions were devoted to the union, chiefly economic, questions connected with wages, hours, working conditions, social insurance, and the settlement of disputes with the railroad companies in line with the provisions of the Watson-Parker Act of 1926. There is no denying that these were vital and urgent questions for the workers. Yet, by ignoring political problems, the Brotherhoods manifested a kind of isolationism. This policy was not devoid of purpose, for its aim was to divert the attention of over a million railroad workers away from crucial issues and to hold them in a state of political narrow-mindedness and ignorance.

Such then were the outlook and political position of the leaders of the Socialist Party, the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Railroad Brotherhoods. On the eve of the war, all of these organizations, except the Socialist Party, were large associations to which millions of organized workers belonged.

It is important to recall that, compared with the giant propaganda machine at the disposal of the ruling circles and the big unions, the democratic forces in the labor movement had only limited possibilities and means to influence the minds and feelings of the broad masses.

Only by taking these difficulties into consideration is it possible to evaluate the work of the progressive forces in the United States. Among these forces special mention should be made of the Communist Party; the labor parties in the states of New York, Minnesota and Wisconsin; the democratic forces within the C.I.O. and A.F.L.; and numerous organizations among intellectuals and students. At the same time, however great the influence of the reactionary forces may have been in the American labor unions, especially in the A.F.L., one cannot put an equal sign between the sentiments and actions of their top echelons and those of the great mass of rank-and-file workers, especially the ones organized in the C.I.O. Of course, Green and his team did everything possible to limit the scope of the protest movement, but democratic traditions had an impact on the progressive mood of the active participants in the movement.

An important part in labor's struggle for peace and against fascism and war was played by the progressive forces in the



C.I.O. unions. Their influence could be seen, for example, in some of the resolutions of the Constitutional Convention in Pittsburgh in November 1938. Taking part in that convention were delegates from many new unions who held progressive views on both domestic and foreign policy issues. Also present were delegates from Canadian industrial unions that had joined the American C.I.O. The condemnation of fascism and war voiced by the C.I.O. in those years was supported by many organizations in America.

The unanimously adopted resolution in defense of democracy declared that the efforts of organized labor in the fight to bring about industrial and political democracy for the American and Canadian peoples cannot be separated from efforts to achieve and preserve democracy in the whole world.<sup>1</sup> It further noted that the warmongering fascist governments of Germany, Italy and Japan bound themselves together by the common objective of dominating weaker nations. The resolution stressed that in their own countries they mercilessly suppressed the trade union movement and flouted civil and religious freedoms. The convention declared that the American people should give neither material nor moral support to aggressive powers which were determined to impose fascism on the whole world by means of blatant aggression and war.

The C.I.O. and some of the unions affiliated with it did much to implement the resolutions. They conducted educational campaigns and held numerous meetings in defense of peace in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and other cities. Particular attention was devoted to the events in Spain. Many workers took part in the movement in defense of the Spanish Republic, denouncing the fascist aggression of Germany and Italy who were giving assistance to Franco's mutineers. For example, the thirtieth annual convention of the Pacific Coast District No. 38 International Longshoremen's Association, held in Seattle, Washington, in May 1937, adopted a resolution stating that the longshoremen would give full support to the Spanish workers and trade unionists who were waging a life

<sup>1</sup> See, *Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the C.I.O.*, p. 261 (see Resolution No. 70).

and death struggle in defense of democracy and against fascism.

The International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union of the West Coast, formed in 1938, at its first annual convention in Aberdeen, Washington, condemned the Embargo Act of 1937 which banned the sale of arms to the Spanish Republic.

We should mention here the changes that were taking place in legislation on neutrality. On August 31, 1935, Roosevelt had signed a law providing for U.S. neutrality in possible international conflicts. That law banned U.S. exports of weapons, ammunition and military equipment to any belligerents. The President was given the power to determine when the embargo should go into effect and to approve the lists of weapons, ammunition and strategic materials that could not be exported. He was empowered to designate the ports subject to closure to ships of belligerents, and was to caution American citizens against travelling on the ships of such powers. The law did not prohibit Americans from trading in goods other than those on the President's list. It also stipulated that every American citizen or firm traded at their own risk.

Such were the basic points of the first version of the American neutrality act, passed in anticipation of conflicts provoked by the aggressive powers. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, in particular, speeded up the passage of the Embargo Act. However, as the situation in Europe and Asia changed in the following years, amendments to the neutrality law became increasingly urgent.

Roosevelt was one of the advocates of re-examining neutrality with the aim of extending the Monroe Doctrine to all countries of the American Continent. Ruled by these considerations, Congress in February 1936 introduced two amendments to the original Neutrality Act of 1935. In the first place, its provisions no longer applied to American countries. That meant that if one of them would be at war with any non-American state, the arms embargo would not apply to that American state. In the second place, the United States was prohibited from granting loans or credits to belligerents.

Finally, in the spring of 1937, U.S. business community succeeded in inducing Congress to make very substantial concessions to England, which was interested in getting goods and strategic materials from the U.S. in the event of war. As a result, on May 1, 1937, the Neutrality Act was amended to allow belligerents to purchase raw materials and other goods with the exception of munitions from the United States on a cash-and-carry basis, that is, they would have to transport them on their own or chartered, but non-American, ships. The neutrality law now also permitted short-term credits to belligerents.

It is not hard to see that the arms embargo legislation was aimed against the Spanish Republic, which had no opportunity of buying weapons, ammunition and strategic materials in the U.S. At the same time, Germany and Italy were openly supplying Franco with all kinds of weapons. The progressive democratic forces in the United States realized the danger implicit in American neutrality and embargo legislation. Among the progressive forces of the country, the West Coast longshoremen were in the front ranks of fighters for peace and against fascism and war. In the years preceding World War II, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union was aware of the threat that fascism posed to labor and all people in general, and it used all means to bring it to public attention and block it. It consistently urged repeal of the neutrality law. In a special resolution, the first I.L.W.U. convention demanded the immediate lifting of the embargo that was actually directed against the legally elected government of the Spanish Republic.

The Pacific Coast longshoremen also protested against the persecution of trade unions in Germany. In practice, this expressed itself in a boycott of all German goods on the West Coast. The longshoremen refused to load or unload the German and Italian ships *Karlsruhe* and *Cellini* in San Francisco. There, too, American workers of Chinese descent organized picket lines against strikebreakers who were loading scrap iron on Japanese ships. Similar actions were taken in Oregon ports, where actual strikes took place, as a result of which a number of ships heading for Italy and Singapore had to cancel their voyages.

In the second half of the thirties, fascist Germany stepped up its espionage activities. This fact was brought out in the press and became common knowledge throughout the country. In California, the German General Consul in San Francisco was exposed. The progressive citizenry of California urged the U.S. Government to put an end to the intrigues of fascist agents. The voice of protest in California was echoed in the U.S. Congress. In November 1937, Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York reported details of the subversive activities of American fascists in California, particularly after the appointment on June 4, 1937 of the well-known fascist, von Killinger, as general consul in San Francisco. At the conclusion of his speech, Dickstein gave a whole list of Nazi spy organizations and individuals operating in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1939, new attempts at espionage in California were made known. The labor community of the Pacific Coast reacted with indignation. At its second convention in April 1939, held in San Francisco, the I.L.W.U. unanimously adopted a resolution clearly defining the longshoremen's position on all questions relating to the growing danger of fascism and war and the U.S. government's policy of neutrality. The convention condemned the activity of the German-American Bund, a fascist organization bent on undermining democracy, and urged the State Department to close the German Consulate in San Francisco, which was in fact an espionage center, and other organizations that threatened the security of the country.

On the eve of the war, fascist and reactionary organizations working in favor of the Axis countries grew in numbers. Among the better known were the German-American Bund, Italian Fascists Clubs, Japanese Servicemen's League, Steel Helmet (Stalhhelm), Fate of America Party, Patriots of the Republic, Russian Fascist Party, Black Shirts, Silver Shirts, the League of Black Dragon, and the Black Legion. A number of reactionary organizations—the America First Committee, the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan, to name a few—had been in existence for some time.<sup>2</sup>

Among the latter, a religious organization with the fine-sounding name of National Union for Social Justice exerted

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, November 17, 1937, Appendix, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> See, Albert Kahn, *High Treason*, 1950, p. 245.



considerable influence on many Americans. Headed by Father Charles Coughlin, a pro-fascist priest, the organization operated in such industrial centers as Detroit, Chicago and a number of cities in Pennsylvania.

The existence of such a large number of pro-fascist organizations in the United States was not necessarily a sign of a nationwide fascist danger. Actually, the fascist movement in the United States did not assume broad dimensions. Fascists failed to get any mass support from the American people. The democratic traditions formed over the decades in the American nation constituted a rather strong barrier to reactionary forces. Another and no less important reason was that the American bourgeoisie had no need for a fascist dictatorship; it regarded the two-party system as a sufficiently influential and effective instrument for running the country. The two bourgeois political parties were able to win the backing of the American people, making wide use for this purpose of the illusions which bourgeois democracy engendered.

This did not mean, of course, that the reactionary forces were not seeking to establish a hard political line in government. Widely known in this regard were the attempts made by a rightist group of Republicans who had formed the so-called Liberty League in 1935 to suppress labor unions, abolish unemployment relief, and persecute the Communist Party and other progressive organizations.

Although inside and outside Congress a fierce struggle raged around legislation and domestic policy as a whole, there was no question for the ruling class in choosing between bourgeois democracy and fascism. The very concept of fascism meant more than a regime of terror of finance capital alone. In the U.S. it would have involved abolishing the Constitution and the electivity of Congress and the President, that is, the liquidation of the whole two-party system and the establishment of a fascist nationalistic party patterned after the Nazi model. The American bourgeoisie, regardless of the differences of opinion within its ranks concerning methods of government, did not consider it either possible or necessary to take the route of abolishing the bourgeois two-party system.

Despite the fact that fascism did not become a national threat within the United States, the progressive forces were sensitive to

the dangers it presented. It was no accident that Governor Elmer Benson of Minnesota, who had for many years led the Progressives in his state, pointed out in his inaugural message of January 5, 1937: "Secret, subversive organizations like the Black Legion, the Silver Shirts and the Ku Klux Klan present a constant threat to our freedom."<sup>1</sup>

In this connection, progressive working-class organizations on the eve of the war called on the people to intensify the struggle against reaction and its extreme expression, fascism. The second annual convention of the I.L.W.U. came out against U.S. recognition of the Franco government and demanded the withdrawal of Hitler's and Mussolini's fascist troops from Spain, effective measures to protect Spanish refugees, and an end to the terror and repression against the Spanish people. The union pressed for a policy of collective security and close cooperation among the peaceloving countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, to protect their mutual interests against any provocation on the part of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Thus, the I.L.W.U. went further than Roosevelt, who even in his Chicago speech said nothing about cooperation with the Soviet Union. The American longshoremen condemned the aggression of Germany, Italy and Japan against Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia and China, and urged that the U.S. Neutrality Act be revised so as to establish a total embargo on war materials to Japan, Germany and Italy.

In another area, in the Midwest, large segments of labor were also fighting against the menace of fascism. Subversive fascist elements had ensconced themselves in a number of cities in that region. The labor press reported protests by unions against the provocative activity of the German-American Bund in places with a high concentration of Americans of German origin. In Wisconsin, for example, Nazi agents staged a brazen provocation in the city of Kenosha, which ended in the beating up of workers.

Such provocations only served to stimulate the workers in many unions to greater activity. The Spanish people's struggle against the fascists found growing support. At the second convention of the automobile workers' union, the 1,500 delegates

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, February 10, 1937, Appendix, p. 1357.

adopted a resolution supporting the Spanish people in their struggle against Hitler and Mussolini.

It was no accident that in those days, in the center of the industrial district in Chicago, Roosevelt delivered his anti-fascist speech calling on other countries to take united action against aggression. The progressive labor paper of union Local 248 at the plants of the Allis-Chalmers Company in Milwaukee, endorsed the President's speech and called on workers to increase the struggle against the danger of war and to help the American people rally round President Roosevelt in his efforts to preserve peace. At one of the mass meetings of this local, the workers demanded a boycott against Japanese-made goods. In connection with Roosevelt's Chicago speech, they quite clearly declared that to keep America out of war was to keep war out of the world. This indicated that the local was against an isolationist interpretation of peace for America, and that progressive workers realized that the only possible way to preserve peace for America was through consistent struggle against war.

About 10,000 workers were employed at the plants of the Allis-Chalmers Company in Milwaukee, where the *Allis-Chalmers Workers Union News* was published. Of these, 7,500 belonged to Local 248 (C.I.O.). The president of the local and editor of the paper was Harold Christophel. The workers could always find a broad coverage of events in Europe and Asia in the paper. Furthermore, it explained the whole danger of the processes taking place in the world. It came out in defense of the Spanish Republic, exposing Franco and the intervention of German and Italian troops. It also advocated spreading the boycott against Japanese-made goods and worked toward the holding of a national congress for peace and democracy.

Between November 26 and 28, 1937, the Fourth Congress for Peace and Democracy was held in Pittsburgh. It was sponsored by progressive left organizations including the Communist Party of the U.S.A. An active part in the Congress was taken by the American League Against War and Fascism, progressive C.I.O. unions, and progressive groups of intellectuals. The American League Against War and Fascism was a large anti-war organization established on September 29, 1933 in New York. Local labor parties and trade union, church, women's and youth

organizations took part in its formation and work. One of its prominent leaders was Dr. Harry F. Ward.

The League denounced the aggressions against Spain and China in many statements. On May 13, 1938 it issued a statement to the government and Congress presenting a thorough analysis of the international situation. The statement emphasized: "The wars now being waged in Spain and in China, the plans of those who have invaded these countries, threaten the world with another general conflict."<sup>1</sup> It further pointed out: "The immediate responsibility for this general course of disaster rests upon Germany, Italy and Japan, because they are now waging war upon the soil of other nations in violation of their pledged word."<sup>2</sup>

The League criticized U.S. foreign policy, considering it intolerable to sell munitions to fascist countries while the government of the Spanish Republic was being isolated. It demanded a strict embargo on any arms destined for use against the Republicans in Spain. It insisted on an embargo on munitions and military and strategic materials for Italy, Germany and Japan, a halt to the financing of these countries, and non-recognition of any of their territorial seizures.

The League condemned the U.S. foreign policy aimed at establishing trade relations with the Axis powers. It proposed increasing economic cooperation with all countries that were victims of attack by the aggressors. The League actively supported the O'Connell Peace Bill, introduced on May 13, 1938 in the House of Representatives by Congressman Jerry J. O'Connell of Montana. The bill advanced these demands: to draw a line of distinction between aggressors and their victims and to shape American foreign policy accordingly; to lift the embargo on arms shipments to the Spanish Republican Government; to ban the granting of economic resources to aggressor countries waging war in violation of contractual relations; to implement a policy of collective, coordinated actions by peaceloving countries with the aim of quarantining the aggressors; and not to recognize any of the territorial seizures made by Germany, Italy and Japan.

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record*, June 17, 1938, Appendix, p. 12748.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



A number of international and local C.I.O. and A.F.L. unions joined the movement to back this bill. It was reported that about one thousand unions in 46 states asked for the passage of the O'Connel Peace Act.<sup>1</sup>

On May 28-29, 1938, a National Anti-War Congress was held in Washington. Taking part were public organizations playing a prominent part in the movement for peace. Among these were the National Council for Preventing War, the International Women's League in Defense of Peace and Freedom, the League of Resisting War, the auto, clothing, and women's garment workers' unions, and a number of branches of the Socialist Party and trade union locals. The Anti-War Congress declared that the United States was violating the spirit of genuine neutrality through its embargo against the legal Spanish government, and maintaining trade with Italy and Germany. It stressed that nonintervention and the embargo were bringing this tragic farce to its logical conclusion, which in fact led to betrayal of the cause of democracy. The Congress demanded a ban on arms deliveries to the fascist forces in Spain.

The progressive labor press reported in 1937 that the American Communications Association and the National Maritime Union of America had also come out in support of the American League Against War and Fascism and had announced their intention to take part in its fourth annual convention. The C.I.O. unions kept tabs on sentiments in the U.S. Congress and determined their own conduct in line with them. For example, they supported Senator Gerald P. Nye, who in April 1938 introduced a joint resolution that would nullify the joint congressional resolution of January 8, 1937, banning U.S. exports of arms, equipment and war materials to Spain. Nye's resolution, if approved, would empower the President to lift the arms embargo against Republican Spain on the condition that the arms were shipped on non-American ships. Recognizing the ineffectiveness of the arms embargo, Nye said in an accompanying letter to the Senate that he was prompted to introduce the resolution by a desire to remove the injustice that emerged from the embargo, an injustice that cast a shadow on the age-old traditions of the nation.

<sup>1</sup> See, *Congressional Record*, June 17, 1938.

However, political enemies of Republican Spain in Congress had by that time already done their work. Their sabotage and obstruction of effective measures to establish a real embargo against the fascists and to aid the Spanish Republicans had achieved their aims. The joint congressional resolution introduced by Nye was a belated gesture by those who liked to show off their "democratic spirit".

The struggle of the Spanish Republic aroused sympathy in the progressive sections of the American working class.

Many, displaying the ultimate in internationalism and solidarity, volunteered to go to that far-off country to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with the Spanish people for the Republican cause. On January 6, 1937, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was formed and later fought in the 35th Division of the Spanish Republican Army. Shortly afterward, the George Washington Battalion was formed. Later, they were merged into the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, whose heroic volunteers bravely fought in the heavy battles at Jarama, Quinto, Belchite, Fuentes de Ebro, Teruel, Aragon and elsewhere. American Communists and Socialists were in the forefront of the movement to defend democracy in Spain and took an active part in the armed struggle of the Spanish Republic.

In early January 1937, a conference, organized by the American League Against War and Fascism, was held in Chicago, bringing together participants in the anti-war movement representing seven Midwestern states. The conference, in which a group of C.I.O. delegates also took part, focussed its attention on the demand that Congress repeal the Embargo Act. At the same time, a similar conference was held in New York in the School of Social Sciences. It was attended by 460 delegates from 400 different organizations in the Northwestern states, representing the movement in defense of Republican Spain. Among the participants were about 150 delegates from union locals representing 338,000 industrial and office workers.

An active part in the movement for peace and in defense of Republican Spain was played by university and college students. Mass demonstrations in which almost a million students from 700 colleges and 200 universities took part were staged in April 1937.

The Communist Party and some trade unions carried on important work among progressive workers. On May 1, 1937, they organized mass worker demonstrations in a number of cities. The Communist press reported that 200,000 industrial and office workers took part in them in New York, 50,000 in Chicago, and 30,000 in Philadelphia, with somewhat less impressive demonstrations and meetings in other cities (Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, Seattle).

The progressive forces established the United American Spanish Aid Committee, which operated extensively in various states collecting money, medicines, food and clothing for the Spanish Republicans. It also sent teams of volunteer doctors and nurses to Spain, and shipped busses equipped as medical stations. For example, the branch of this Committee in the state of New Jersey collected and sent clothing and ten tons of food. In New York and other cities, money was collected to aid the victims of fascism in Spain. Trade unions contributed \$ 102,500 to the international solidarity fund. In May 1937, the United American Spanish Aid Committee collected and shipped 150,000 dollars' worth of food and clothing. By decision of the 23rd convention of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, a drive was launched among C.I.O. union members to collect \$250,000 for the fund to aid the Spanish Republic.

On the whole, however, the protest movement against war and fascism proved to be insufficiently organized and influential. A defensive barrier could not be raised with resolutions and letters of protest. True, the movement was convincing confirmation of the anti-war sentiments of the working people and their hatred of fascism. At the same time, it was impossible to halt aggression by merely stopping the loading or unloading of ships belonging to the fascist countries, for hundreds of others steamed out of the ports of the country to make their way across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The longshoremen, their union admitted, stopped work in thirty-five separate cases in a futile attempt to stop the flow of strategic materials to Japan. It was impossible to prevent war by endless endorsement of Roosevelt's Chicago speech, which created only the appearance of the U.S. Government's intentions in the struggle against fascism.

The progressive forces of the United States failed to create a united popular front against fascism. The movement did not become massive or influential enough to compel the U.S. Government to change its foreign policy course and abandon neutrality and appeasement of the aggressors. At that time, not only in the United States but in the whole world, there were no such organized and united social forces as could respond in deed to the Soviet Union's call for collective security, alter the course of history in favor of peace, and thereby prevent the Second World War.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE CLASS NATURE OF ROOSEVELT'S LABOR POLICY

A study of the whole body of data relating to President Roosevelt's labor policy during the period prior to World War II brings one to certain general conclusions. The first is that Franklin D. Roosevelt's ideas about the ways and means of resolving social conflicts were different from those of his predecessor. This was connected with the fact that he assessed the situation in the nation differently and realized that poverty had become a national calamity, the further exacerbation of which threatened to overthrow the very foundations of the capitalist system. To do things "Hoover's way" meant objectively to help shatter the illusions, still prevalent among Americans, about the advantages of bourgeois progress. This was the leitmotiv in the President's thinking.

Roosevelt realized that the price of delaying reforms would be too high; the crisis was an extremely costly lesson. He felt that to entrust the government to the conservatives again would mean committing a possibly irreparable blunder. He wrote in 1932, in a letter not intended at the time for wide publicity: "...Another four years of Hoover's inept leadership, or rather complete lack of leadership, will spell disaster for the country."<sup>1</sup>

The choice was made: liberalism was proclaimed the banner of national policies. Addressing the Democratic Party convention on June 2, 1932 (the speech in which the words "new deal" were first uttered), Roosevelt said: "To meet by reaction that danger of radicalism is to invite disaster. Reaction is no barrier to the radical. It is a challenge, a provocation. The way to meet

<sup>1</sup> F.D.R. *His Personal Letters, 1928-1945*, New York, 1950, pp. 281-82.

that danger is to offer a workable program of reconstruction...."<sup>1</sup> The situation was such that the slightest delay in effecting reforms "from above", however undesirable they might be, would deprive the dominant class of its control over the conduct of the masses. A sharp turn would then be made "from below" by means that were equally familiar to Europe and America. This idea threaded through many of Roosevelt's private letters and appeared in many of his public addresses—the fear of spontaneous actions by the masses, who, in desperation, could at some point decide that nothing could be solved by half-measures. On February 5, 1935, the President wrote to Henry L. Stimson: "These are not normal times; people are jumpy and very ready to run after strange gods. This is so in every other country as well as our own."<sup>2</sup>

In 1936, Roosevelt again returned to this same question, now citing international experience as an additional argument in favor of the New Deal. In a talk with newsmen he said: "Suppose Brother Hoover had remained President until April, 1936, carrying on his policies of the previous four years; in other words, hadn't taken any steps towards social security or helping the farmer or cutting out child labor and shortening hours, and oldage pensions. Had that been the case, we would have been a country this past April very similar to the country that Blum found when he came in. The French for twenty-five or thirty years had never done a thing in the way of social legislation. Blum started in and he jumped right into the middle of a strike the first week he was in office."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, Roosevelt's "new approach" to solving the basic class conflict that in those years manifested itself in American society with particular acuity, could not in principle lay claim to being original nor be regarded as some kind of anomaly in the bourgeoisie's world outlook or in the whole system of its conduct. The policy of concessions and reforms had been practiced from time to time before, with the aim of stemming the growth of revolutionary tendencies within the labor movement.

<sup>1</sup> *Nothing to Fear. The Selected Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932-1945*, London, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> F.D.R. *His Personal Letters, 1928-1945*, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought. The Social and Political Ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, East Lansing, 1958, pp. 210-11.

Roosevelt had his ideological precursors. He drew a great deal from the ideological and political legacy left by the pillars of bourgeois reformism, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. However, in the historical context of his time, Franklin Roosevelt had to go beyond the bounds of moderate reformism and advocate a course toward more drastic changes.

The explanation for this should not be sought in Roosevelt's special sympathies toward the labor movement. Like his predecessors, he looked upon the labor movement as an unavoidable evil, but since it existed and even threatened the capitalist foundations, Roosevelt felt it had to be reckoned with. The extremes of exploitation always aroused Roosevelt's displeasure, but not so much because of their inhumanity as because they could always spark a reaction, the consequences of which would have been impossible to foresee in the conditions prevailing in the thirties. That is why he openly, and sometimes sharply, chastised certain groups of industrial magnates for their lust for profit "at any cost", for their overt hostility, intolerance and arrogance with respect to workers and trade unions.

It is not surprising that those whom Roosevelt publicly criticized paid him back in animosity. Some bourgeois politicians and writers, financiers and industrial barons reproached Roosevelt for his "friendliness" and heightened sensitivity to the labor movement, and were distressed over the disproportion of his "sympathies"; others went further, charging him with subservience to the workers and with other sins, right up to inclinations toward socialism. All those who were on the right cursed him for allegedly having selected as the target for attacks those forces in American capitalism on which its might rested (that is, the major conservatively-inclined monopoly groupings), and thereby deliberately, with purely demagogic motives, strengthening their antagonist, the labor movement. But neither Roosevelt himself nor his closest associates deserved this accusation. Their thoughts were focussed not on strengthening the labor movement at the expense of big capital, but ultimately on preserving for the latter the key positions in society, in the economy and politics.

No one sensed the unfairness of the charges made against him more than Roosevelt himself. Once, vexed by the needling from the right, he exclaimed: "It was this Administration which saved

the system of private profit and free enterprise after it had been dragged to the brink of ruin...."<sup>1</sup>

The charges of non-resistance to radicalism and of unwarranted "softness" on labor made against Roosevelt by his political opponents in the reactionary camp and by "conscientious" conservatives were based either on misunderstanding or (more often) on a reluctance to grasp the underlying motives of the President's policies. In principle, Roosevelt never denied the legitimacy of using coercive methods of social conciliation.<sup>2</sup> Through his experience as a politician, however, he developed caution and circumspection which often prevailed over emotion and in many instances restrained an inner impulse to take a hard line against the left wing of the labor movement. After assuming the presidency, he came to believe even more in the correctness of this approach, no matter what angry attacks from the conservative opposition it might entail. At the height of the biggest class confrontations in the history of American capitalism which took place in industry between 1934 and 1937, the temptation to resort to the services of the armed forces was great, and, moreover, his advisers frequently urged him to do so. But Roosevelt remained true to himself, *up to a certain point* preferring reforms to machine-gun crews and prison cells for the "radicals". In the autumn of 1936, reasserting the rightness of his position, Roosevelt again referred to that place in his 1932 Chicago speech where he rejected methods of brute force as the only means of fighting radicalism. He commented as follows: "We were against revolution. Therefore, we waged war against those conditions which make revolutions...."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, as far as possible, such methods of pacification as tolerance, exhortation and friendly gestures should be tried first, recognizing that in principle another method is not excluded. In a letter to Samuel Rosenman, dated November 13, 1940, Roosevelt wrote: "So also in affairs at home, I live, as you know, in constant dread that the national security might, under remote circumstances, call for quick and drastic action. You and I have

<sup>1</sup> *Nothing to Fear, The Selected Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932-1945*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> See Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., *Roosevelt and Howe*, New York, 1962, pp. 140, 145.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought*, p. 39.



faced that possibility since 1928 and there have been a number of occasions when, both in Albany and Washington, it took real calm not to call out the troops. Little do people realize how I had to take abuse and criticism for inaction at the time of the Flint strike."<sup>1</sup>

Roosevelt's interest in the working class stemmed above all from his understanding of the social and economic problems which faced the American bourgeoisie and required immediate solution in order to preserve the economic and political conditions of its existence. The main aim Roosevelt was trying to achieve was first softening internal antagonisms and then establishing social harmony and class peace without resorting to the dangerous methods which had been used by Hoover and discredited in the eyes of the democratic forces. His friendly attitude to labor leaders of the reformist mold, so irritating to many representatives of the business world, was directed to the same end. When he lunched with labor leaders in the White House and consulted with them, his main concern was to popularize his program of modernizing capitalism, which in his view would make it possible to hold the labor movement to positions of economism as an appendage of the liberal party. That was why Roosevelt, ignoring the outcries from the right, collaborated and maintained contacts with the A.F.L. and C.I.O. leaders.

The President regarded this tolerance and readiness to grant labor organizations legal recognition as a means of letting the steam out of the labor movement, as a means of politically and formally associating it with the power structure. Latent ferment, Roosevelt felt, was always more dangerous than a legally existing movement, as long, of course, as it was headed by "labor leaders" dedicated to bourgeois law and order. An "open crater" which from time to time provided an outlet for passions always caused him less anxiety than the restrained and at any cost suppressed discontent of millions of people, who "will not stand by silently forever" anyway.<sup>2</sup>

By bringing reformist leaders closer to him and winning their confidence, the President was able, among other things, to get a

<sup>1</sup> *The Roosevelt Letters. Being the Personal Correspondence of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, Vol. 3, 1939-1945. London, 1952, p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> *F. D. Roosevelt. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. 1, p. 646.

clear-cut picture of various trends among the leadership in American labor, and of the balance of forces in it. Nor did Roosevelt shun the rapidly maturing opposition within the A.F.L. leadership, namely, the movement headed by John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman, who were, as many bourgeois politicians felt, "pink" in their political attachments and had embarked on the road of explosive action which made it unlikely that capital would be able to come to terms with them. On the contrary, Roosevelt sought to rely on them for the sake of realizing his own political plans. At the same time, he did not deprive the conservatives in the A.F.L. of his favor, being only too glad to have their support.

Roosevelt's liberalism fit in well with his natural penchant for complex maneuvers aimed at gaining an advantageous position and then, at the right moment, exerting decisive pressure on the social forces threatening the stability of the capitalist order and the predominance of the two-party system. His political rhetoric was permeated with declarations of sympathy with ordinary people and their problems.

Roosevelt's formula for a balanced solution included not only a stock-taking of the real balance of opposing forces, but also the rule of priority under which the claims of capital were always regarded as first and foremost.

Not surprisingly, in the initial phase of the New Deal, when the labor movement still lacked the organization and unity to wage a vigorous offensive, the President remained passive when it came to implementing his promised social reform program. He torpedoed the labor-backed Black Bill for a 30-hour week and delayed the passage of social insurance legislation. It is generally acknowledged that Roosevelt himself never showed any particular interest in the famous Wagner Labor Relations Act,<sup>1</sup> and endorsed it only by virtue of the pressure of various political circumstances.

The weakness of the labor movement in the first half of the thirties still offered advantages to the big financial and industrial groupings. The labor unions made certain gains—but only in the areas where they were strong; on the whole, however, their overall influence in social life remained limited. Their member-

<sup>1</sup> Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, New York, 1946, p. 239.

ships were small and fragmented because of the archaic union structure and the drawbacks of old separatist traditions. Even after receiving certain constitutional guarantees, the labor unions would not have been able to increase their social weight and win greater influence on politics without a powerful democratic upsurge and widespread anti-monopoly sentiments throughout the nation.

Organized labor's ailments were no secret to Roosevelt and he took them into account when he devised his tactics. Whenever the balance of forces was clearly tipping against the unions, the President, without hesitation, took the side of the monopolies. This happened, for example, in 1934, when Roosevelt, in a united front with the auto magnates, broke the general strike of auto workers and, rejecting a timid A.F.L. move to reach a compromise in drawing up an "automobile code", literally imposed upon the workers conditions dictated by the monopolies. At that time, he ignored the purely token protests of the A.F.L.<sup>1</sup>

But before long the situation began to change. Workers became more active and, what is most important, more organized in their fight for the implementation of a program of social changes. They opposed delays in carrying out democratic reforms. Behind every postponement they saw a return to the old times, and this was something that the working class was determined to prevent.

In 1935, yielding to pressure from the mass movement, Roosevelt took a leftward step. He decided to put through a series of measures that would finally give the New Deal the coloring it had laid claim to from the very beginning.

In the spring and summer of 1935, the White House undertook a protracted siege of the stubborn Congress. Roosevelt should be given his due: in a complex situation he showed persistence and vigor. On the eve of the 1936 election campaign, the question stood like this: whether to follow the old tradition of holding a steady political course until after the elections, or, not fearing the resistance of reaction, to move in a direction dictated by the state of the economy and balance of class forces. Of the two alternatives, Roosevelt chose the second.

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, February 13, 1935; *Nation*, February 20, 1935, pp. 208-09.

Under pressure from the Administration, Congress passed the Wagner Act, the Social Security Act, and the Guffey Coal Act, providing for government regulation of the coal industry (thanks to which a general coal strike was averted). Almost \$5,000 million was appropriated for public works, measures were taken to provide jobs and material assistance for youth, etc. In a fit of blind rage, the reactionary *Chicago Daily Tribune* proclaimed that the goal of all these steps was not economic rehabilitation, but revolution.

The reactionary forces hoped for revenge in the 1936 elections. Their attack against the New Deal compelled the liberals in the ruling class to seek closer cooperation with workers, farmers and democratically-minded petty bourgeois segments of the urban population. The process of forging the organizationally incohesive democratic New Deal coalition was accelerated. The working class, while it was a constant factor and cementing force in this coalition, did not play a leading role in it. Hence the vagueness of its ideological and political program. The split of the labor movement complicated the situation.

Trying to prevent an unfavorable impact of this split on the outcome of the elections, the Roosevelt Administration outwardly removed itself from the conflict. However, behind the scenes, Administration representatives engaged in a complex intrigue, seeking to achieve a reconciliation between the C.I.O. leaders and the monopolies, at the same time being careful not to arouse A.F.L. suspicion of any special New Deal favoritism toward the opposition.

The consolidation of the nation's democratic forces brought an outstanding victory to Roosevelt. The main contribution was made by organized labor. But although stronger than before, it was still unable to win a decisive voice in the democratic bloc. This contradictory position of the working class in many ways explained one curious feature in Roosevelt's 1936 election campaign, namely, that the leader of the Democratic Party was reticent when it came to making promises. The Democrats built their pre-election rhetoric on the contrasts between the "dark days" of the Republican administration and the achievements of the New Deal. They chose to remain silent about constructive contributions in the coming four years. There were only nuances that gave a hint that the Democrats' position on the



labor question was more radical than that of their main political rivals, the Republicans, whose program was replete with anti-Roosevelt slogans advanced by monopolistic reactionaries.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the mandate that the workers unanimously gave Roosevelt was, as it were, not filled in. This obscurity in turn gave rise to doubts within democratic circles about which way Roosevelt's real plans were aimed: toward deepening the New Deal, or toward abandoning any further progress in the field of social policy as called for by leading financial and industrial groupings. There were many reasons to believe that the spirit of liberalism would easily disappear from government spheres if pressure from the labor and democratic movements were to slacken.

It appeared that events corroborated these apprehensions. The labor unions proceeded from the need for the federal government to concentrate on unemployment relief and housing construction for the poor, and all progressive forces insisted on a clear-cut, deep-going and well-planned program to combat the approaching new crisis. However, the Administration, having declared after the elections that the war against the depression was over, began to curtail public works instead of drawing up a new program. Popular discontent was not long in coming to the surface.

The American Labor Party of New York, which was created by labor organizations, evoked little enthusiasm either in the Administration or among the Democratic Party bosses, despite the fact that it had rendered Roosevelt a great service by mobilizing labor votes in support of his candidacy in 1936. Although the leaders of the A.L.P. constantly stressed their devotion to Roosevelt as the national leader, the idea of an independent political organization of workers was to a certain extent embodied in the very creation of the party. And it was clearly implied that, in any event, this could very well be realized with the aim of further developing the successes that the labor movement had achieved during Roosevelt's first term in office. The thought that his re-election could do a service to the process of crystallizing an independent political party of the working class was hardly a pleasant one for Roosevelt.

<sup>1</sup> *Current History*, August 1936, p. 53.

The growing inclination of the working class to independent political action, as well as the increasing radicalization of the middle strata, took on special meaning for Democratic leaders in the light of the serious conflicts between the New Deal Administration and the left wing of the labor movement that occurred in 1937 and 1938. The giant corporations made a frontal attack on the labor unions in the basic industries, striving at any price and by any means to prevent them from exercising their legal right to organize workers. The labor movement, particularly its progressive part represented by the C.I.O., was extremely interested during that period in winning the goodwill of the White House. The Administration, however, turned a deaf ear to the important recommendations and requests made by the unions. It was at that time that, in an interview given to the *Common Sense* magazine, John L. Lewis made a transparent hint about a possible reorientation of the labor movement toward forming a farmer-labor party. Even more significant was the talk Lewis had, also at that time, with leaders of the unemployed movement, David Lasser, a Socialist, and Herbert Benjamin, a Communist. In a confidential letter to the leader of the Socialist Party, Lasser said that Lewis had spoken (albeit restrainedly) in favor of taking steps to organize a broad autonomous political movement of workers, farmers and democratically-minded middle strata on an anti-monopoly platform spearheaded against the once again very real threat of reaction.

The friction between labor and the Administration increased even more when the ineffectiveness of Roosevelt's measures to cope with the economic crisis of 1937-1939 became clear.<sup>1</sup> Speaking on behalf of the C.I.O. leadership at a convention of the clothing workers' union, John L. Lewis hinted that the C.I.O. was preparing for a major drive to organize under its

<sup>1</sup> Criticism of the New Deal from the left on questions of economic policy increased on the pages of the liberal magazines, *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Christian Century* and others which often reflected labor's views. As Roosevelt's colleagues and advisers were later to note, the cabinet had ultimately to reckon with this criticism (James A. Farley, *Jim Farley's Story. The Roosevelt Years*, New York, 1948, p. 91-150; Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, 3 volumes, New York, 1953-1954, Vol. II, pp. 260-340; Frances Perkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 302; Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt*, New York, 1952, pp. 169, 181).

aegis the army of public works employees. In that same speech he underlined the need for the labor movement to become more involved in politics.

The situation in the Congress of Industrial Organizations born in sharp class battles with the monopolies, its prevailing spirit of serving the "little" man, and the idea of struggle for the interests of the "wronged and oppressed", put their stamp on the political attitude of its leaders, be it the militant John L. Lewis or the cautious and evasive Sidney Hillman. The coolness between Roosevelt's Administration and the C.I.O. leadership set in with the sit-down strikes in the basic industries. This alone indicates that relations became strained not because of a misunderstanding or merely because of critical comments by John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman with respect to the government's policies. Roosevelt expressed his displeasure with the forms of struggle which the C.I.O. used to defend the just demands of the workers. He called them unwarranted and unfair, and said that he shared the opinion of the public, which was as tired of the extremists in the C.I.O. and some of the A.F.L. unions as it was of extremists like Girdler (president of Republic Steel Corp.) and his colleagues, supported by Morgan's Guarantee Trust Company.

But the White House was disquieted not only by the forms of struggle that the C.I.O. endorsed. The C.I.O. was out to draw the bulk of American workers into the orbit of its "mutinous" actions, and this, in turn, would mean a substantial shift in the overall balance of class forces. In a book about Hillman, Matthew Josephson says: "Many of us forget, in these later years, what a colossus John L. Lewis appeared to be toward 1937 and 1938 when he spoke confidently of organizing 'twenty millions'—nay, 'thirty millions'—under the banner of the C.I.O. Roosevelt feared him much as he had feared Huey Long and his share-the-wealth slogan."<sup>1</sup> Quite naturally, the President did not want to risk the reputation of the New Deal by letting the initiative slip through his fingers.

Thus, the upsurge of the mass labor movement, reinforced by voices favoring the forging of a political mechanism that would

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Josephson, *Sidney Hillman, Statesman of American Labor*, New York, 1952, p. 465.

be independent of the bourgeois parties, plus considerations relating to the forthcoming 1940 elections, induced Roosevelt and his supporters in Congress to renew their campaign for pro-labor legislation. The indefiniteness which in 1937 and 1938 had colored relations between organized labor and the New Deal Administration disappeared, and the bonds between them once again grew strong. After the political feelers of 1937 and 1938, the Roosevelt Administration reaffirmed its adherence to a course toward social reforms. Exposures of the monopolies began to alternate with measures to expand public works for the unemployed and to aid small and medium-sized farmers and the urban petty bourgeoisie. But the most important step to meet the labor and democratic movement half way was Roosevelt's endorsement of the Fair Employment Act.

Roosevelt's concession to the labor movement promised the Democrats the support of organized labor in the 1940 elections. One after another, C.I.O. and A.F.L. unions declared their devotion to the New Deal. But Roosevelt wanted to be sure that political conservatism would be unable to retaliate for the defeat it suffered in 1932 and thereby influence the growing polarization of class forces and attitudes. Roosevelt never lost the conviction that, in the complex domestic and international situation on the eve of the United States' entry into the war, any political gain by the opponents of the New Deal and by the bourgeois reaction rallying around the Republican Party, would ultimately increase the danger of a further shift to the left in the sentiments of the masses, prompting them to search for a way out that would suit neither the right nor left wings of the bourgeoisie, nor its moderate strata. The Republican success in the 1938 congressional election brought Roosevelt to the conclusion that it was again necessary to openly appeal to the working masses in order to avoid squandering the political capital the Democratic Party had acquired. Roosevelt proposed to enlist the support of farmer and labor organizations.<sup>1</sup> Once again, a leader of the liberal bourgeoisie, defending the general class interests of the bourgeoisie, had to seek support from its antagonist, and even to a certain extent to act as its representative. This is how the dialectical law of the relations of antagonistic classes operates on American soil.

<sup>1</sup> F.D.R. *His Personal Letters, 1928-1945*, p. 836.



Roosevelt's speeches containing criticism of the monopolies, especially his cutting speech of April 1, 1938, were concordant with the anti-monopoly sentiment of the masses, and therefore elicited a burst of frenzy in the representatives of big capital. Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes wrote to Colonel R. Robins in August 1939 that concentrated wealth (that is, the monopolies) was determined to defeat Roosevelt, even if it had to do it at the price of a national catastrophe.

As we showed earlier, the years of the New Deal saw an increase in strikes and organizing drives. This circumstance was exploited by bourgeois liberal theorists to promote the thesis that Roosevelt had revived the labor movement by freeing it of the fetters of anti-labor practices and making the federal government the guarantor of the right to free association and to legal forms of struggle for better living conditions. The liberalization of the internal political situation strengthened the belief of the workers that the new Administration was unbiased and ready to deal with the various traditional forms of the proletariat's economic struggle on a fully democratic basis. The workers felt that their right to protect their economic interests by available means through collective actions (strikes, picketing, etc.) was self-evident and absolutely binding on all. Having won official recognition of the right to unite into unions of their own choice, the workers could not tolerate a situation in which these associations would be robbed of their main weapon—the right to strike during negotiations with the employers within the bounds defined by the codes. Such an outcome would have been absurd and altogether unjustified. But this was precisely the demand the Roosevelt Administration made as the main condition for the success of the whole "recovery program".

The idea that strikes were undesirable was organically inherent in the system of mediation and conciliation introduced by Roosevelt. The "social partnership" slogan was elevated to the rank of government policy. The government was counting on the success of this slogan both in the unions and among employers. Indeed, the soil for the acceptance of these ideas among the Gompersite labor leaders was already prepared, for American trade unionism had long since identified its ideological and ethical views with those of business. The road to the cooperation of the bourgeois government as a "third

force" in the unionemployer system could be considered completely cleared when the A.F.L. in the early thirties switched from the traditional philosophy of "voluntarism" to an acknowledgement of labor's limited social responsibility and of the growing role of the government in solving the problems of economic development and industrial relations.

The corporations were considerably less receptive to the idea of "equal partnership". Many of them were stubbornly reluctant to adopt a polite tone and admit the fact that the labor unions had become a basic force in socio-political development. Running into the arrogance of capital, which was as always jealously guarding its right to uncontrolled dominance, Roosevelt and his labor experts bent every effort to persuade the champions of the old ways that a transition to more refined methods of exploitation and more civilized means of making profit was necessary. Better aware of the needs of social progress from the standpoint of the general interests of the bourgeoisie, the government imposed, as it were, on capital its role as "honest broker" in relations with the labor unions. Permanent government arbitration bodies were set up in industries. The government began to help and encourage the appearance of all kinds of plans and programs designed to introduce both workers and capitalists to the idea of "class collaboration".

Prior to the thirties, these methods had been used only on a limited scale. For a long time capital preferred a different line: the open shop, the elimination of trade unions, discrimination against union members, discrediting, discharging and blacklisting unionists, using injunctions against union activities, employing strikebreakers and paid informers, inflaming public opinion against unions through the press, and forcible suppression of the seats of labor-union initiative.

Roosevelt understood that conditions had changed, that in a world permeated with revolutionary ideas it was impossible to rely on these methods alone. In an effort to cultivate illusions of common interests between labor and capital, the Roosevelt Administration took the initiative in promoting a "new" technique of class relations at enterprises. It worked hard to change the industrialists' reactions to industrial legislation, which private capital had for many decades regarded as a bugbear, as an illegal government incursion into the sanctuary of "free enterprise".

Roosevelt constantly pointed to the dangerous turn of events that could take place if the capitalists failed to modify their conduct and continued engaging in what was termed as "unethical business practices".

The institutions Roosevelt invested with the functions of mediation and control over industrial labor relations devoted enormous energy to establishing smooth relations between employers and the reformist trade unions, and to teaching employers how to use proper manners in contacts even with "rebels" like John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, or Walter Reuther. The National Labor Relations Board, set up by Roosevelt in 1935, persistently and consistently impressed upon the capitalists the need to hide their animosity to the unions and assume a veneer more in line with the demands of modern "ethics" and more in keeping with the situation. In its first annual report, the N.L.R.B. condemned employers for spreading propaganda against unions and thus not only poisoning the minds of workers against them but also indicating to them that the employers were antagonistic to unions. The N.L.R.B. urged employers to stop using insulting epithets like "swindlers" and "parasites" when referring to union activists, and refrain from labelling unions and union members as gangs of thieves, bums, jail-birds and Reds.

Little by little, monopoly capital began to change its stance, by no means voluntarily, but under pressure from two directions—from below (the struggle of the workers) and from above (exhortations, criticism and a series of orders from the government). The Gompersite trade unions, only recently considered by most industrialists to be an infernal invention and an assemblage of conspirators, gradually began to enjoy attention and even patronage as entirely legitimate institutions and a useful means of spreading what from the point of view of the bourgeoisie were sensible economic teachings, ideological beliefs and political doctrines. Employer paternalism was becoming not only an important instrument in the production of relative surplus value, but the basic means of influencing the social consciousness of the working class as a whole. On an increasingly large scale, a variety of paternalistic schemes carried out under the flag of "social partnership" began to replace the traditional policy of systematically fattening the narrow upper

stratum of workers. Having entered such a tense period, the American power elite deemed it possible and necessary to provide economic and moral incentives to broader sections of the working class.

Thus it was that in the 1930s, especially toward the close of the decade, with the blessings and most active assistance of the architects of the New Deal, there began the introduction of a system of "human relations" in industry, representing the aggregate of organizational measures and ideological devices aimed at educating the workingman in the spirit of "class collaboration" and reconciliation with the system of capitalist exploitation.

From the very beginning of the New Deal, the Department of Labor built its activity on the principle of compromise between capital and labor, giving high priority to publicizing various innovations and the idea of approaching the workingman not only as a factor of production but also as a "person". This once again shows how organic to the bourgeois class is the old thesis that workers and employers have "common interests".

But it was not merely a matter of producing a purely psychological effect. The promotion of the ideas of "class partnership", supplemented by improved techniques and a ramified system of government arbitration and conciliation, was designed, in addition to everything else, to put a freeze on the activity of the rank and file in organized labor. The government's goal was ultimately to establish a situation in which labor disputes would be settled in the main at the table of conciliation commissions. The will of the workers there would be present only as a moral factor, and even then refracted through the flowing speeches of union legal advisors and bourgeoisified labor leaders. What the Roosevelt Administration accomplished in this direction should not be underestimated. In a book called *Union Solidarity*, published in 1952, American sociologist Arnold Rose wrote: "Within the last fifteen years the greater activity of the government in controlling labor relations has also reduced somewhat the possibility of direct action by rank-and-file members. More of the union's activity is now carried on by lawyers and other experts."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arnold M. Rose, *Union Solidarity*, Minneapolis, 1952, p. 12.



From the Marxist point of view, bourgeois reformism as a byproduct of the class struggle has a dual character. It indicates a certain step for the better, but at the same time pursues the aim of weakening and smothering the energy of the masses and clouding their consciousness. In the United States, this character of bourgeois reformism never manifested itself more vividly than during Roosevelt's presidency. The New Deal helped in surmounting the country's economic difficulties and prevented a spontaneous burst of indignation on the part of the laboring masses. Nor should the tendency to use corporative forms for regulating employer-employee relations be discounted. But even so, the upsurge of the labor movement was not stopped. On the contrary, taking advantage of the favorable possibilities, organized labor gathered strength on the eve of World War II, not yielding to the temptation to stop at what was achieved in 1933-1935, and continuing to wrest ever new gains from the bourgeoisie. The New Deal reforms were thus not reforms marking a descending line of political development. They were reforms along an ascending line, with a growing proportion of the working class becoming involved in the active making of history. This process, from the standpoint of its internal political aspect, was sharply retarded by the war.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

The labor movement in the United States is a subject to which American historians and sociologists devote much attention. An increasing number of books on various aspects of the activity of the working class and its organizations appear year after year. The book market is constantly replenished with monographs, biographies of labor leaders, memoirs, etc. All this literature varies in content, scholarly level and direction.

Our intent here was to draw a very general picture of the development of the historiography of the labor movement in the United States between the two world wars and to pinpoint the basic ideas of the schools and currents represented.

\* \* \*

A prominent place in the historical literature on the subject belongs to the Wisconsin school, which was headed by John R. Commons (1882-1945), for a long time a University of Wisconsin professor. Commons was well-known as an economist, historian and sociologist and at the same time enjoyed the reputation of being an experienced hand at regulating industrial relations. In the first two or three decades of the 20th century, he took an active part in many government commissions charged with investigating industrial disputes.

In 1904, Prof. Commons and a group of historians and economists began research in the field of the U.S. labor movement. They gathered a large number of documents

relating to the labor movement (the first ever collection of such dimensions), part of which was published under the editorship of Commons in 1910-1911 in ten volumes.<sup>1</sup> The next stage of this group's work culminated in the publication of a four-volume collective work on the history of the labor movement in the United States, written on the basis of a wide range of original source material. The first two volumes came out in 1918, and the third and fourth in 1935. The work covered events up to 1932. The authors were John R. Commons, Selig Perlman, John B. Andrews, Helen L. Sumner and others.<sup>2</sup>

In his own works, Commons set forth the fundamental theoretical and methodological concepts of the Wisconsin school. His views on the development of the labor movement and his description of the specific features of the economic and political development of American society may also be found in the introductions he wrote to *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Vol. IX), *History of Labor in the United States* (Vol. III), and an article entitled "Labor Movement", appearing in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.<sup>3</sup> A further elaboration of his basic propositions is given in Selig Perlman's work on the theory and history of American trade unionism.<sup>4</sup>

Commons' varied activity in government labor relations regulation, historical research and teaching had many followers. Besides those named above, mention should be made of E. Brandiez, John Fitch, Alvin Hansen, Edwin Witte, Arthur Altmeyer and others who, as they worked in various government agencies, put his ideas into practice, using them as

<sup>1</sup> *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, Vols. I-X, ed. by John R. Commons and others, New York, 1910-1958.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Commons et al., *History of Labor in the United States*, Vols. I, II, New York, 1918, Vols. III, IV, New York, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Commons and John B. Andrews, Introduction to Vols. IX and X, *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, Vol. IX, Cleveland, 1910, pp. 19-55; John R. Commons, Introduction to Vols. III and IV, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. III, New York, 1935, pp. IX-XXX; *idem.*, "Labor Movement". *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, New York, 1932, pp. 682-96.

<sup>4</sup> Selig Perlman, *A History of Trade Unionism in the United States*, New York, 1923; *idem.*, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, New York, 1928.

guidelines in settling labor disputes and drawing up the basic provisions of labor legislation.

The Commons school emerged in the early 20th century under the influence of the social, economic and political changes taking place in American life. Those were years of rapid economic and political development for the United States, marked by an unprecedented growth of monopolies and enrichment of the bourgeoisie, all of which helped to promote the ideas of individualism, utilitarianism and pragmatism.

The onset of the era of imperialism was attended by intensified class contradictions and an upsurge in the labor and socialist movements. All this led to unrelenting social conflicts and a crisis of bourgeois ideas. This crisis generated theories, eclectic and inconsistent to one degree or another, combining idealism with utilitarianism. Pragmatism became the prevailing trend in American philosophical, sociological and historical writings.

Certain sections of the working class chose the "practical" road of struggle to improve their conditions, namely, agreements with employers at the expense of other categories of workers. This was the road taken by the leaders of the A.F.L. And pragmatist historians supported this direction.

Commons' views as an economist were influenced by ideas found in vulgar bourgeois political economy. Commons and his followers adopted the "historico-statistical" method in their study of the history of the American labor movement. Notwithstanding the limitations of this approach, Commons was the first American historian to devote serious attention to the economic situation of the American proletariat. The method of analyzing the society, however, was dictated by the general sociological views held by Commons and his followers. For this reason, the Wisconsinites approached the matter of characterizing American capitalist society only from the angle of that society's organization, moving such things as moral traits, skills and customary methods of management and exchange to the fore as constituting the decisive factor in social development. They endeavored to picture changes in supply and demand, often purely quantitative changes in the



economy, and technological advances as the basis of the society's development.

Defenders of the Commons-Wisconsinite theory claim that John R. Commons and Selig Perlman made a great contribution to the study of the economic factor, since they viewed economic relationship as the medium from which emerged the jurisprudential product. But what they meant by "economic relationship" was not the relations of people in the process of production, but economic agreements and contracts connected primarily with the sphere of exchange.

Trailing after exponents of vulgar political economy like the German economists Karl Bücher and Gustave Schmoller, the Commonsites held that the expansion of markets had engendered mercantile capitalism, that subsequently advances in technology had ushered in the period when the employer-capitalist predominated, and that, finally, with the development of the credit system, came the stage of banking capitalism. Consequently, although Commons did acknowledge that the labor movement was a reaction and protest against capitalism, essentially he considered the main contradictions in society to be those between different kinds of capitalism, rather than between the working class and the capitalists, thus leaving the production relations of people devoid of class content. Moreover, as time went on the very concept of protest against capitalism, in Commons' treatment, became increasingly innocuous, since it was reduced to a necessary counterweight and mutual balancing in a democratic society.

Proceeding from this, Commons regarded the labor movement not as being the result of antagonistic contradiction between the class of capitalists, which owns all the means of production, and the proletariat, which is exploited by the capitalists, not as the result of the exploitation of the proletariat in capitalist society, but rather as the result of temporary cyclical technical changes in production which bring about changes in supply and demand. It follows from this, according to Commons, that the capitalist and worker formally possess equal rights as buyer and seller of labor. Employer and employee, he said, are engaged in a common enterprise.

"They jointly assume the rights and share the burdens and benefits of the enterprise."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, both employer and employee depend to an equal degree on the sphere of exchange, on supply and demand, where an unfavorable situation hurts them both at the same time. The worker in this case is threatened by unemployment, which, according to Commons, is only cyclical in character, that is, it is caused only by a disruption of market relations and is by no means a permanent attribute of capitalism. He denies that unemployment—one of the major factors determining the workingman's condition and affecting his psychology—is one of capitalist society's chronic ills.

Commons' treatment of this question shows that he saw in unemployment a purely technical problem rather than a social one. Therefore he suggested that the reasons for unemployment should not be sought in the capitalist system, but in some kind of individual economic "errors".

Commons maintained that unemployment could be eliminated with the help of "scientific management" of industry by means of drawing in experienced economists, statisticians and other experts.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in Commons' theory technocratic notions are interwoven with ideas of vulgar bourgeois political economy.

The elaboration of these eclectic propositions brought the Wisconsin historians to the conclusion that the dominance of industrial corporations and big monopolies made the capitalist system in the United States eternal and unshakeable. According to the Wisconsin school's theory, while class conflicts were natural and inevitable in the period of immature capitalism, they could be excluded altogether in the following period due to the fact that clashes of class interests had disappeared. By drawing "all the expropriated" into the system of production, says Commons, capitalism makes them members of the capitalist class.<sup>3</sup>

In the ensuing harmony, according to Commons' theory, a special role is assigned to trade unionism as part of the

<sup>1</sup> John R. Commons, *Industrial Goodwill*, New York, 1919, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> See, John R. Commons, *Industrial Goodwill*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> See, John R. Commons, *Op. cit.*, p. 193.

"general democratic process". In view of the fact that labor is a commodity bought by employers, the Wisconsinites felt that the main danger to it was the competition coming from cheaper labor. Thus, as they saw it, the function of trade unions consisted in protecting the economic interests of skilled workers from their less skilled colleagues.

The crux of the Commons-Perlman theory is a bourgeois interpretation of the role of trade unions and a restriction of their function in capitalist society. Mark Perlman, one of the popularizers of this theory, says that "unions are a critical element of the historical democratic process, and ... they are essentially social bargaining institutions, aimed at increasing the social status and particularly the economic liberty of working people".<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Wisconsin theory confines the role of labor organizations in capitalist society to purely economic tasks. Selig Perlman notes that the main role and service of the American Federation of Labor consisted of the fact that it concerned itself with a rising standard of living and an enlarged freedom for the unions. Typically, the Wisconsin historians hold up the narrow craft unions as a model.

Locking up the targets of the working people's struggle within the purely economic sphere, as the proponents of "economism" do, rules out working class political action and its struggle for vital interests, which the ruling class will never agree to satisfy under capitalist conditions. The latter fact has been attested to by the history of the labor movement throughout the world, and the United States, where the proletariat had had to wrest even economic concessions from the bourgeoisie by hard struggle, is no exception.

Commons and especially S. Perlman distorted the Marxist-Leninist teaching on the import of revolutionary theory and a revolutionary party for the labor movement. The Wisconsin historians devoted much space in their works to a pseudo-scholarly criticism of the works of the outstanding leaders of the proletariat who gave workers the weapon of scientifically sound theory. Defending craft unionism, labor non-partisanship and the notion that labor and capital have common interests, the Wisconsin historians considered it their

<sup>1</sup> Mark Perlman, *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

duty to belittle the influence of American Marxists in the labor movement and to prove that socialist ideas were inapplicable in America.

According to Commons, the class consciousness of the proletariat was negligible compared with the "group consciousness" and pragmatism of the craft unions. Skilled workers, the Wisconsinites said, having gone through a period of apprenticeship and training, undeniably had the right to rise a step above the other, less skilled, workers, and zealously to protect their advantages. As Selig Perlman noted, labor leaders Gompers and Strasser, who stood at the cradle of American craft trade unionism rendered a great service in that they had gone through the school of American reality and replaced the concept of "class consciousness" with that of "group consciousness".

Commons and his followers deliberately tried to minimize the significance of many large labor actions, including the first national struggle of the American proletariat in the 1880s for shorter hours, the right to organize and better working conditions. Exponents of the Wisconsin school regarded the struggle of unorganized workers for trade unions as competition with the "legal" and "truly American" A.F.L. These were positions from which they assessed the role of the Knights of Labor Order at the end of the 19th century, the militant Western Federation of Miners, the Industrial Workers of the World, and other mass organizations.

They did not alter their point of view despite the fact that after the turn of the century technological progress and changes in the conditions of production had created giant industries, which put formation of mass industrial unions high on the agenda. They continued to close their eyes to the objective socio-economic processes, and they continued to protect the craft unions because they expressed individual interests and because they felt that as long as a person retained his individuality, he was protected against class sentiments. Therein lie the real reasons why the bourgeois historians were sympathetic to craft unions.

The Wisconsin historians made the theory of the "exceptionalism" of American capitalism their ideological platform. It is not without reason that expressed in the American historical



literature is the view that "Wisconsin labor union theory begins, with Commons, as an attempt to explain the peculiarity of the American labor movement".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, avoiding making an analysis of the general basis of American capitalism and its history, the Wisconsinites held that the labor movement in the United States was the result of specific American conditions. They called on their followers to focus attention on the peculiarities of the history of the U.S. labor movement. These included such things as manpower fluctuation, the absence of age-old traditions, "free" land in the West, the democratic electoral system, immigration, and the heterogeneous, multi-lingual makeup of the working class.<sup>2</sup> It should be emphasized in this connection that a scientific analysis of these features of the American labor movement can be found in many works by Marx, Engels and Lenin. They show the important impact these factors had on the development of the labor movement in the United States.

The "exceptionally favorable conditions for the deep-going and widespread development of capitalism"<sup>3</sup> in the United States constituted one of the basic factors influencing the working class for a long time. The favorable conditions for capitalist development included, above all, the absence of large feudal landholdings, the capitalist development of agriculture, the absence of feudal remnants or monarchical traditions, the fabulous growth of capital and its concentration mainly within the country for the development of its own resources.

Capitalism in America expanded favorably in depth and breadth owing to rapid Western land development and the growth of the railroads, with the United States coming to rank first in the world in railway mileage. There were many other factors as well, such as the absence of compulsory military service, which in many European countries took away the cream of young manpower. At the same time, as the classics of Marxism-Leninism concluded from their analysis of the capitalist development of America and the development of

<sup>1</sup> David Herreshoff, "Books About American Labor", *The American Sociologist*, July-August, Vol. 5, Nos. 7-8, 1958, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Selig Perlman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 165-69.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 215.

class contradictions in the country, the laws and to a large extent the ultimate results of capitalist development were the same in England and America.<sup>1</sup>

The Wisconsin historians ballooned the theory of American exceptionalism in order to bolster their thesis that there were no stable social demarcations in American society. This supposedly made it possible for the greater part of society to be actual or potential property owners.<sup>2</sup> Exceptionalism was thus intended to hedge American workers off from class consciousness and prevent proletarian unity, limiting their interests to improving working conditions and protecting themselves from competitors. Labor solidarity, joint actions, the unification of skilled and unskilled, of foreign born and American born, Negroes and whites, men and women—all this, in the view of the Wisconsinites, ran counter to the prevailing sentiments of American workers and was therefore doomed to failure.

Preaching class collaboration in capitalist society, the Wisconsinites championed reformism in the labor movement and opposed an independent political movement of workers. Like many trade union leaders, they maintained that, owing to the "exceptional" conditions in the United States, American workers had no need for an independent party. The participation of workers in political struggle, they felt, only dampened the "trade union spirit" and weakened the labor movement. Commons and Perlman suggested that American workers restrict their involvement in political life to the business of establishing a system of "political collective bargaining", that is, to supporting at election time those figures in the bourgeois parties who come out for specific economic demands of the trade unions. "This method," wrote Perlman, "is, of course, most effective when both parties are so matched that labor holds the balance of power."<sup>3</sup>

Instead of the struggle for socialism the Wisconsinites advanced "solidaristic action against the common overlords"

<sup>1</sup> See, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in three volumes, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1973, p. 443.

<sup>2</sup> See, Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Selig Perlman, *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

undertaken by "the medieval guilds", whose day to day economic tasks were understandable to the rank and file.<sup>1</sup> They sought to protect the trade union masses from "unaccessible theories" and the "transcendental", abstract idealism of the "intellectuals", thus addressing themselves to the weakest sides of the American labor movement and the theoretical backwardness which had taken shape historically and which the American working class had difficulty in overcoming. The unusually favorable conditions for the development of capitalism in America, and the "feverishly enterprising spirit of Americans",<sup>2</sup> as Engels put it during his visit to the United States and Canada in 1888, impeded the growth of a proletarian class consciousness. Engels on more than one occasion wrote about the fact that "Americans are worlds behind in all theoretical questions".<sup>3</sup> All this was, as Lenin wrote later, favorable soil for the developing opportunism, for pure trade unionism, which concentrated all its efforts on achieving narrow, practical demands and pursued a bourgeois labor policy.<sup>4</sup>

Amid the growth of the American proletariat's political activity and profound dissatisfaction among the trade union masses with Gompers' conservative policy, the Wisconsin school made it a point to extoll the right-wing leaders of the labor movement and their policies. Thus, Selig Perlman said that "it was the shrewd pragmatism of men like *Samuel Gompers* who really shaped the development of key American collective institutions".<sup>5</sup> Philip Taft, in his two-volume history of the A.F.L., maintained that Gompers "personifies" the American labor movement.

Relying on the theory of exceptionalism, the Commons group offered a corresponding interpretation of the entire history of the American working class. It was from this angle that the Wisconsin historians depicted the most important

<sup>1</sup> See, Selig Perlman, *Op. cit.*, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, 1967, Bd. 37, S. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1975, p. 374.

<sup>4</sup> See, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> *Industrial Relations Research Association, Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting*, Chicago, December 28-29, 1951, p. 165.

milestones in the struggle of American workers, the major strikes and other actions of the proletariat in the 19th and 20th centuries, all the while striving to conceal behind the total sum of facts and their praise of the reformist positions of the A.F.L. leadership the militant traditions of the American proletariat in the class struggle with the capitalists.

A new stage in the internal political struggle in America began with the onset of the general crisis of capitalism. The impact of the October Revolution in Russia, the increasing revolutionary tendencies of the progressive part of the American proletariat, the growing political maturity of the broad masses of working people, and the emergence in 1919 of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. spurred the Wisconsin historians to greater activity. They came out with a number of new works against the Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle.

In their works, Perlman and Taft dealt sparingly with the upsurge of the labor movement after World War I. They devoted amazingly little space to such significant events as the coal miners' strike, or the steel strike in which, it will be remembered, William Z. Foster played a leading role. On the other hand, they characterized Gompers and Green as the "heroes" of the labor movement. Assessing the upsurge of the labor movement in those years as an insignificant deviation from its evolutionary development, the Wisconsin historians tried simply to overlook the direct connection between the great social and economic changes occurring throughout the world and the tremendous upsurge of the strike struggle in the United States and the growth of the political activity of American workingmen in the period 1919-1922.

Taft resorted to crude anti-communist fabrications, explaining the "radicalism" in America in those years as "the subversive activity" of Communists. Essentially, the historians of that school sought to reduce the entire U.S. labor movement to narrow trade-unionist empiricism. Not only did they deny that independent political struggle by workers was natural and inevitable, but strove to show that it was unwise and impractical to unionize workers along industrial lines and bring the broad masses of unskilled workers into the ranks of such unions.



The Wisconsinites interpreted the temporary economic upswing or so-called Prosperity of the mid-twenties to mean that eternal, flourishing capitalism was firmly established. They hastened to declare that the "era of prosperity" and class peace proved the "ultimate success" of American capitalism and conclusively refuted the Marxist theory of class struggle.

Completely divesting themselves of terminology from "the era of class contradictions", the Wisconsin labor historians set about defending the American way of life. They claimed that between 1924 and 1929 there was not only a real rise in the workers' wages and living standards, but the whole system of labor relations, production management and regulation and hiring had changed in the direction of greater democracy.

The Wisconsinites explained the temporary slump in the labor movement in the mid-1920s not as being the result of the economic situation, the opportunist policies of the A.F.L. leadership or the employers' ideological manipulation of the working masses, but primarily as the consequence of the inertia and apathy of the workers themselves.

The events of the thirties, the mass gravitation toward the industrial form of organization and the vigorous protest against antiquated craft unionism, the strike struggle, the growth of the political activity of American workers and their fight for social justice and democracy, the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations—none of this moved these historians to take a sober look at reality. Taft said of Selig Perlman that in the main, despite the changes, his understanding of history had stood the test of time. Commons' followers continue to picture trade unionism as the bulwark of "American civilization".

After 1917, historians of the social reformist direction came out with a number of works in which along with expressing their views on the labor movement as a whole they fought against any increase in the influence of communist ideas both in the world at large and among the American working class. Although the exponents of social reformism did not reject a party of the working class, they defended an "evolutionary" development of the labor movement, restricting themselves, as Lenin wrote about reformism, to "agitating for changes which do not require the removal of the main foundations of the old

ruling class, changes that are *compatible* with the *preservation* of these foundations".<sup>1</sup> The social-reformists tried to instill in their readers the illusion that it was possible to improve American capitalism by social legislation.<sup>2</sup> Walling was asserting this same idea when he wrote that the collective bargaining system in industry was inevitably bringing workers into more active participation in the economic and social life of the country.<sup>3</sup> Such assertions linked the social-reformist historians with the Wisconsin school. There was complete understanding between Walling and the Commonsites in their views on American trade unionism and the apolitical nature or "neutrality" of the labor movement.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to somehow explain the upsurge of the working-class struggle in the early 1920s, Walling gave a more extended interpretation to one of the main points in Commons' theory of collective bargaining: "...Organized labor", he noted, "had passed from an almost exclusive preoccupation with wages, hours, and collective bargaining to a broadly constructive economic and political policy."<sup>5</sup> In his view, however, the problems dealt with under this policy could be solved only on reformist lines, that is, through broader legislation.

The profound socio-economic and political changes that American society underwent in the early twenties prompted many American historians essentially to criticize certain points in the Wisconsin theory. This was done, for example, by E.E. Cummins and Mollie Ray Carroll,<sup>6</sup> who saw the upsurge of the labor movement as natural and inevitable and explained it by the dissatisfaction of the workers with the trade unionist policy of the Gompersites. Cummins said that a Communist Party

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> See, John Spargo, *Americanism and Social Democracy*, New York, 1918, pp. 198-99.

<sup>3</sup> William English Walling, *American Labor and American Democracy*, New York-London, 1926, (the editor of this book was John Commons).

<sup>4</sup> See, William English Walling, *Op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> William English Walling, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> E. E. Cummins, *The Labor Problem in the United States*, New York, 1935; M. R. Carroll, *Labor and Politics. The Attitude of the American Federation of Labor Toward Legislation and Politics*, Boston, 1923.

appeared in the United States just at a time when the situation was ripe for the creation of revolutionary organizations. Right after the war, he said, events rapidly and steadily prepared favorable soil for radicalism.

In her work *Labor and Politics*, Carroll spoke of the changed conditions for trade union activity, the growth of worker interest in industrial forms of organization, and the fact that those forms were winning more and more supporters: "...Industrial union groups are usually more 'radical' than craft unions. If these groups gain in power, they may tend to alter the policies of the Federation."<sup>1</sup>

A group of historians who were then in the left wing of bourgeois historiography, J.B.S. Hardman, B. Mitchell, A. Epstein and others, spoke even more emphatically about the changes taking place in the American labor movement. Their works depicted the conflict between the new forms of the labor movement and the old leadership, the broader demands of the working class, and the growth of the left forces. "The one significant sign of the growth of labor," wrote J.B.S. Hardman, "is the evolution of the labor mind from viewing wages and hours as its sole concern and collective bargaining as its sole aim, to the bidding for a progressive share in the proceeds of industry and a voice in industrial management."<sup>2</sup> While the "Gompers regime" fettered the movement, unions in many leading industries opposed craft unionism. They demanded broad worker representation in the work of resolving economic problems.

Some historians recognized the prestige and contribution of the Communists in the struggle against the rightist leaders of the A.F.L. and in uniting progressive labor forces.<sup>3</sup>

But in assessing the activity of the Communist Party and in dealing with the question of an independent labor party or independent working-class political activity, all bourgeois historians proceeded from narrowly pragmatic considerations. Whereas the historians of the rightist trend — John Commons,

<sup>1</sup> Mollie Ray Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *American Labor Dynamics in the Light of Post-War Developments*, ed. by J.B.S. Hardman, New York, 1928, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See, *American Labor Dynamics...*, p. 22.

Selig Perlman and their followers — frankly preached "pure trade unionism" and denied the need and possibility of an independent working-class party, Cummins, for example, conceded that only a party created by the workers themselves could really express the interests of labor. At the same time, he said that the difficulties standing in the way of building such a party in the United States were so formidable that it would die before seeing the light of day.

The industrial boom of 1924-1929, the relative improvement of the workers' economic position, the definite ebbing of the strike wave as compared with the preceding period, and the strengthening of U.S. economic and political positions in the world, all combined to create favorable conditions for the broad dissemination in the bourgeois historical literature of various shades of the theory of American exceptionalism. Class peace and prosperity were proclaimed to have been established once and for all in American society.

In books by Walling, Childs and others which appeared at the time, the material conditions in which the American working class as a whole lived in the period of "Prosperity" were described as being extremely favorable. These writers extolled the economic position of American workers, and maintained that the year 1924 signalled the beginning of an era when a worker's interests completely coincided with those of his employer and with the prosperity of the given enterprise. "The worker plus the employer together are the 'Industry,'" "Industry," wrote Dyche,<sup>1</sup> a trade union official who later became an employer himself. This was not the only case, incidentally, of a trade union leader going into capitalist business during the period of "Prosperity". These preachers of the reformist and trade-unionist way of development for the labor movement tried to wipe out from the memory of the working class the militant actions of the early 1920s, and to convince it that permanent class peace had been established, ignoring the fact that even during the period of "Prosperity" about 400,000 people took part in strikes every year.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John A. Dyche, *Bolshevism in American Labor Unions*, New York, 1926, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> See, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, Washington, 1949, p. 73.



Childs saw in the A.F.L. and the Chamber of Commerce the only organizations that expressed the views of workers and employers. He lauded the cooperation between these organizations and felt that it guaranteed the successful development of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Together with employers and the A.F.L. leadership, bourgeois historians made persistent efforts to persuade American workingmen that they had become their employers' partners. Workers and their unions were urged to create labor banks, to invest their meager savings in industrial shares, etc.

Louis Reed's book on the "labor philosophy" of Samuel Gompers,<sup>2</sup> showed the author's solidarity with the theory and practice of American trade unionism over the first decades of the A.F.L.'s existence. Gompersism, according to Reed, was in keeping with the spirit of the times.<sup>3</sup> He lamented that "the present decade has brought one defeat after another to this type of unionism". As a result, "the labor movement becomes more and more impotent, less and less important in the life of the nation".<sup>4</sup> Writing in 1930, Reed predicted the demise of the organized labor movement in the U.S.A. if it did not fundamentally change its philosophy and political principles in keeping with the new conditions.<sup>5</sup>

The revival of the workers' militant spirit and their courageous struggle against capital during the depression of 1929-1933 and the New Deal period sapped popular faith in some of the basic propositions in the theories advanced by those scholars who sought to develop, popularize and put a theoretical footing under the idea that the working-class movement was adapted to American capitalist institutions. The Wisconsinites could offer no satisfactory explanation for the rapid growth of industrial unions in the basic industries, the crisis of the A.F.L., the active participation of workers in the

<sup>1</sup> See, Harwood Lawrence Childs, *Labor and Capital in National Politics*, Columbus, 1930, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Louis S. Reed, *The Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers*, New York, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

democratic movements of the time, and their support of the idea of independent political action by their class.

It is not surprising that many bourgeois historians writing in the thirties took a new approach in presenting the history of the working-class movement. Outstanding among them were S.H. Patterson, Harry A. Millis, Royal E. Montgomery, Lois MacDonald, Emanuel Stein, Jerome D. Davis, and some others.<sup>1</sup> In his history of the A.F.L., published in 1933, Lewis L. Lorwin criticized the apology of Gompersism and the A.F.L., and acknowledged that the organizational structure of the U.S. labor movement was archaic and that its leadership was not up to the new and urgent tasks.<sup>2</sup> His was one of the first works in American bourgeois historiography to point out the weaknesses in the Wisconsinites' theory of the working-class movement. He stressed that it was impossible to squeeze the entire complicated and at times contradictory process of the emergence and development of the organized working-class movement in the United States into the narrow framework of a preconceived scheme designed to justify the A.F.L.'s policy of craft unionism. He believed that the change in the trade-unionist ideology brought about by economic and social causes in the late twenties and early thirties was not accidental. In the new situation, wrote Lorwin, the rhetoric of many leaders of major A.F.L. unions assumed a highly radical tone, to the point that they "now speak of a possible collapse of capitalism and of an immediate danger of social revolution".<sup>3</sup>

With belief in the advantages of American capitalism shaken, an historian's appraisal of the past from the viewpoint of the liberal and even radical sentiments widespread among American intellectuals became the criterion of his popularity. The intensity of the class battles of those days gave rise to open skepticism with regard to the doctrine of exceptionalism in the

<sup>1</sup> S. H. Patterson, *Social Aspects of Industry. A Survey of Labor Problems and Causes of Industrial Unrest*, New York, 1935, p. VII; *Labor Problems in America*, ed. by Emanuel Stein and Jerome Davis, New York, 1941, p. V; Harold Seidman, *Labor Czars. A History of Labor Racketeering*, New York, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis L. Lorwin, *The American Federation of Labor: History, Policies and Prospects*, Washington, D.C., 1933.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

development of the American working-class movement and a prevalence of social harmony in the United States. Significant in this respect were the conclusions drawn by the authors of *Labor Problems in America*, published in 1941. Up to a time, they wrote, the idea that the economic development of the United States was unique and that the American working class enjoyed a special status possessed the minds of many people and thus virtually ruled out a comparative analysis in studying the U.S. labor movement.

Criticism of the Wisconsinites' views on the nature of social relations in the United States could also be found in books by MacDonald, Brooks, Millis, Montgomery and other authors,<sup>1</sup> who wrote in the 1930s and dealt extensively with the history of American trade unionism.

The upsurge of the labor movement was in the focus of public interest. Literally everyone felt the impact of the awakened energy of the oppressed class which was only yesterday declared to be "integrated" into the bourgeois world, to have "disappeared", etc. This in turn explains the fact that most of the books about the labor movement published in the thirties were written by journalists—such as Levinson, Harris and Stolberg.<sup>2</sup> The works of professional historians published at that time were also addressed primarily to the general reader. They examined various aspects of the struggle for industrial organization in the thirties, and made an effort to explain the reasons for the split in the labor movement and the formation of the C.I.O.

<sup>1</sup> Robert R. R. Brooks, *Unions of Their Own Choosing: An Account of the National Labor Relations Board and Its Work*, New Haven, 1944; Lois MacDonald, *Labor Problems and the American Scene*, New York and London, 1938, pp. 851-52; Cecil Carnes, *John L. Lewis, Leader of Labor*, New York, 1936, p. 308; William Heston MacPherson, *Labor Relations in the Automobile Industry*, Washington, 1940, pp. 3-4; Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, *Organized Labor*, New York-London, 1945, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March*, New York, 1956; Herbert Harris, *American Labor*, New Haven, 1939; *idem.*, *Labor's Civil War*, New York, 1940; Benjamin Stolberg, *The Story of the C.I.O.*, New York, 1938; Robert R. R. Brooks, *When Labor Organizes*, New Haven, 1937; *idem.*, *As Steel Goes*, New Haven, 1940; J. Raymond Walsh, *C.I.O. Industrial Unionism in Action*, New York, 1937.

The flow of academic studies increased somewhat later—during and immediately after World War II. Studies of individual industries were widespread.<sup>1</sup> In 1954, Harvard University announced plans to publish a series of books on the history of labor relations in various industries. It must be said that when these studies were published, they gave the academic world a great body of factual and often valuable material. However, they lacked broad generalizations. The course of events in a particular industry, the various turns in the struggle for influence among factions in the leadership of specific unions, details of collective bargaining, all tended to overshadow the main thing from those writers—the aggregate worker and the aggregate capitalist, and the nature of the relations that had developed between them.

The emphasis on factual material in these works and the reluctance of their authors to attempt to correlate the characteristic features of labor struggles in specific industries with the general laws of socio-economic development and the development of the labor movement as a whole, in the final count created a distorted picture of the nature of class relationships on a national scale, the place of the working class in the political life of the country, and so forth. This practice of reducing the history of the labor movement to a superficial description of local developments quite precisely reflected the political requirements of bourgeois science, and was itself brought about by a number of latent processes, including, above all, the rightward list in the social climate that occurred immediately after World War II.

The campaign, which began during the cold war, to re-examine the past in the spirit of a frank apology of American capitalism and its economic and political institutions extended also to the historiography of the labor movement. The book market was filled with thick books arguing that American capitalism had reached a qualitatively new phase in its development, characterized by a smoothing out of internal

<sup>1</sup> McAlister Coleman, *Men and Coal*, New York, 1943; V. H. Jensen, *Lumber and Labor*, New York, 1945; Herbert J. Lahne, *The Cotton Mill Worker*, New York, 1944; Jacob Loft, *The Printing Trades*, New York, 1944; Joel Seidman, *The Needle Trades*, New York, 1942.



contradictions and the transformation of the labor movement into a law-abiding institution.

Wide publicity was given to the myth that American capitalism had been transformed into an "affluent state" in which the highest level of affluence for all had already been reached and where harmonious relations between the basic social classes had been established. Historians and sociologists spoke of the many factors that were instrumental in eliminating the causes of social discord. Among the most essential were: the introduction of so-called scientific production management; the existence of equal opportunities for all strata of American society; the "diffusion" of property and the "democratization of capital", which had long since abolished the evils of old capitalism and created a society of equal toilers. According to the generally accepted version, the principles of social partnership had firmly prevailed, and the increased regulating role of the bourgeois state, ushered in by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, had supposedly helped establish a stable and permanent balance of social forces and interests. Pointing to the decline of the relative weight of the working class in the social structure and the decline of trade union activity in politics, many historians and sociologists drew the unwarranted conclusion that the last signs of class consciousness and militant spirit in the workers' milieu had disappeared.<sup>1</sup>

Such are the general ideas on which hung the framework of postwar bourgeois historiography of the labor movement in the U.S.A.

As we mentioned earlier, the stream of literature on the labor movement increased appreciably after the war. The heightened attention of historiography to the history of the national (and most recently, also of the international) labor movement was directly prompted by the inexorable growth of the revolutionary and liberation movement of the working class throughout the world, and the growth of the forces of socialism. The much-experienced American bourgeoisie, feeling the instability of the edifice of world capitalism and

<sup>1</sup> See, *Political Affairs*, January 1962, p. 58.

endeavoring to derive lessons for the future, intensified its efforts to brainwash the working people by spreading the ideas of "class harmony" in the citadel of the old order. It is highly significant that most of the studies on the history of the labor movement were financed by the Rockefeller, Ford and Wertheim foundations and a number of large reformist trade unions. In the final analysis this is what determined the very substance of the works. Extensive studies in the history of the labor movement and labor relations were conducted by university research centers (financed mainly by the states).

The main efforts were concentrated primarily on studying the history of individual trade unions<sup>1</sup> and a number of specific problems. As before, the analytic side of these works is lost in descriptions of less important details. The biographical genre is widely represented, but the books on prominent labor figures (John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, Walter Reuther, Samuel Gompers and others) can only in rare instances be considered impartial; most often they are vehicles for extolling the leaders and their organizing talents and political wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

The relatively small number of major survey works strikes the eye. Among these are Faulkner and Starr's republished book, works by Seidman, Dulles, Rayback, and Pelling,<sup>3</sup> and books by Philip Taft and Walter Galenson, to be discussed here

<sup>1</sup> R. D. Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo*, New York, 1952; Robert A. Christie, *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters' Union*, Ithaca, 1956; Harvey O'Connor, *History of Oil Workers International Union (CIO)*, Denver, 1950; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America. The Nonunion Era*, Cambridge, 1960; Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther*, New York, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Saul Alinsky, *John L. Lewis, An Unauthorized Biography*, New York, 1949; Matthew Josephson, *Sidney Hillman. Statesman of American Labor*, New York, 1952; Maxwell C. Raddock, *Portrait of an American Labor Leader: William L. Hutcherson*, New York, 1955; Charles A. Madison, *American Labor Leaders*, New York, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Seidman, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*, Chicago, 1953; Harold U. Faulkner and Mark Starr, *Labor in America*, New York, 1957; Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America. A History*, New York, 1949; Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, New York, 1959; Henry Pelling, *American Labor*, Chicago, 1960.

later. We might note that many of these are compilations and cannot be classified as original research.

Still, it is quite legitimate to ask: In what direction did theoretical thought develop in assessing the general trends in the development of the labor movement between the two world wars?

Over the decades the views of the Wisconsinites on the history of labor in the U.S.A. remained basically unchanged. Confirmation of this is provided by an article written by Selig Perlman, "The Basic Philosophy of the American Labor Movement" (1951), which summarized, as it were, the concepts of the Wisconsinites.<sup>1</sup> Perlman reaffirmed his fidelity to the thesis that class antagonisms did not exist in American society. He maintained that labor's entire experience in the "stormy thirties" had produced nothing that could serve to refute the Wisconsinite postulate that the movement was "unique". The labor movement was saturated with conformism; it not only rejected the idea of renewing social institutions, but would forever serve as a bulwark of the capitalist system. Such was Perlman's conclusion. The Wisconsinites still see in the rejection of the socialist ideal and of political struggle not only the superiority of the American labor movement, but also the means for "saving" the labor movement in other countries, which, as they state, has succumbed to the temptation of all kinds of collectivist political doctrines.

In 1957 and 1959, Philip Taft published a two-volume work on the history of the A.F.L.<sup>2</sup> which is essentially a sequel to *The History of the Labor Movement in the U.S.A.* published earlier under the editorship of John Commons. Keeping to the old Wisconsinite traditions, Taft's new books bear the stamp of admiration for "business trade unionism". Taft even invites his readers to join him in praising the foresight of the leaders of the A.F.L. and the "positive" actions they allegedly took in defense of the workingman's interests during the economic

<sup>1</sup> Selig Perlman, "The Basic Philosophy of the American Labor Movement", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 274, March 1951, Philadelphia, 1951, pp. 57-63.

<sup>2</sup> See, Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor from the Death of Gompers to the Merger*, New York, 1959.

crisis of 1929-1933, that is, during the very time when the pernicious line of the Federation's executive council brought the labor movement to the brink of disintegration.

In 1964, Taft published another big survey work on the history of organized labor in the U.S.A., which laid claim to covering the entire road traversed by the labor movement, from the War of Independence to the most recent days.<sup>1</sup> In this work he makes an emphatic stand against any re-examination of the Wisconsinites' basic conclusion regarding the everlasting importance for American labor of the ideology of "business trade unionism". He considers trade union economic activity to be the highest form of organized labor.

Like Selig Perlman, Taft denies that the crisis which gripped the A.F.L. in the thirties was inevitable, and characterizes it as "the result of a series of errors and the ignoring of the spirit, practice, and constitution of the A.F.L."<sup>2</sup> In his view, "the C.I.O. was largely a creation of John L. Lewis", who took advantage of the favorable public response and government support.

Taft's conclusions are regarded as being far from incontestable even by some American historians who do not belong to the body of consistent opponents of the Wisconsin tradition. Highly symptomatic is the appearance of a number of works that took issue with the notion that the American working class was lacking in political ideals and was integrated into the world of money-grubbing and individualism. Suffice it to mention that published simultaneously with Taft's books were books by Brooks, Karson, and Brody, which in many aspects refuted the views of the Wisconsinites.<sup>3</sup>

A skeptical attitude to the Wisconsinites' discredited dogmas, and the desire to find a more convincing solution to many problems posed by the development of the labor movement

<sup>1</sup> Philip Taft, *Organized Labor in American History*, New York, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XX.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Brooks, *Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor*, New York, 1964; Marc Karson, *American Labor Unions and Politics, 1900-1918*, Carbondale, 1958; David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919*, Philadelphia, 1965.



itself, prompted some American historians to come up with somewhat different hypotheses. We should mention above all the works of J.B.S. Hardman, Joseph Shister and Walter Galenson. The Wisconsinites' opponents address their objections mainly to applying the Commons-Perlman theory to the phase in the history of the American labor movement that began in the "stormy thirties".<sup>1</sup>

The historians in this group arbitrarily divide the entire history of the labor movement in the U.S.A. into two distinct stages, with the so-called "Rooseveltian revolution" as the watershed between them. They hold that while the basic conclusions of the Wisconsinites could serve as a key to understanding the patterns of the first stage, which, they assert, was characterized by the undivided sway of the philosophy and practice of Gompers' "business trade unionism", a true picture of the metamorphosis which organized labor underwent beginning with the mid-1930s can be put together only by applying new ideas. The rapid growth of union membership in the thirties is regarded as the precondition for converting the unions into a "social force" in national politics.<sup>2</sup> According to Hardman, American labor unions, primarily their leaders, became fully aware of their new role in the harmoniously advancing democratic American community. The A.F.L. and C.I.O. unions achieved such political and legal status in the nation's social structure that they were capable of fulfilling a "constructive" role in the economy and politics equal to that of capital. In their new capacity, writes Hardman, the unions actively discharged the duties of an "insurance agent" who is concerned with the welfare of all strata of society and the preservation of "social equilibrium".<sup>3</sup>

What was it that made the unions a "generally-accepted" and "influential" force in the power structure? In ascertaining what stimulated the sudden growth of unionism and its power

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of Industrial Relations Research Association*, Madison, 1951, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> See, *The House of Labor. Internal Operations of American Unions*, ed. by J. B. S. Hardman and M. F. Neufeld, New York, 1951, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

potential a certain amount of weight is given to changes in government policies that began with Roosevelt's New Deal. However, the main motive force for the changes in the U.S. labor movement and the main reason for the "branching-out" of its sphere of interests and its "enrichment" with political ferment<sup>1</sup> is usually found in the appearance on the scene in the 1930s of a whole group of new leaders "possessive of competence, ambition, imagination and outlook".<sup>2</sup> First John L. Lewis, then Philip Murray, Sidney Hillman, Walter Reuther and other reformist C.I.O. leaders are given all the credit for transforming the American labor movement. It was they, maintains Hardman, who "have been building union power, on economic, political, and social fronts, and endeavoring to reach the place labor merits ... in the dynamic equilibrium of forces which is American organized society".<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, one cannot avoid seeing the appreciable changes that took place in the labor movement in the thirties and the first half of the forties. The sources of these shifts lay in the upsurge of the struggle for organizing workers in the basic industries in the thirties. On the other hand, it would not do to exaggerate the importance of these changes, arbitrarily attributing to modern trade unionism (albeit considerably refurbished in the thirties) the status of an independent variable in the process of framing government policies and thereby balancing the powerful influence of monopoly capital. Unfortunately, in the forties and fifties the new leaders little by little lost much of what was gained in the thirties. Instead of consolidating the leading positions in the social movement occupied by the unions they headed, they relinquished them one after the other, submitting to the political dictates of the monopolies in return for economic concessions and legal recognition. This backward movement led to a situation in which the leaders of the new trade unionism became increasingly deaf to new ideas and more and more inclined toward class collaboration. History provided ample

<sup>1</sup> See, *The House of Labor...* p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Quote from *Readings in Labor Economics and Industrial Relations*, ed. by Joseph Shister, Chicago, 1956, p. 92.

proof of the decisive importance of the movement of the laboring lower classes, and the rise and fall in their activity told on the political line of the leadership.

The exponents of the new approach point to the damage suffered by the Commons-Perlman school because its views failed to correspond with the realities of the labor movement in the thirties; and they point to the split of the A.F.L., the exodus from it of millions of organized workers, as one of the important developments making this non-correspondence manifest. Indeed, we have seen that the Wisconsinites, concentrating their efforts on substantiating the vitality of Gompersism, preferred to regard the crisis in the A.F.L. as a purely accidental occurrence, precipitated by unfortunate tactical errors on the part of the Federation's leadership.

However, with rare exceptions, attempts made by historians to give a broad interpretation of this question never go further than superficial commentaries about the differences within the top officialdom of the A.F.L. concerning the structure of the trade union movement. The explanation the exponents of the new direction give to this important episode leaves no room for an assessment of the underlying processes or the role of the rank and file who deserve the main credit for the achievements made in the fight to restructure the trade unions and for union democracy.

We constantly encounter a nihilistic attitude toward showing the real substance of events and the totality of historical and socio-economic conditions in which they occur, i.e., the very things that ultimately determine the character and the general direction of the labor movement and its inherent characteristics. Everything is usually reduced to the initiative of individual "outstanding" labor leaders. Bourgeois historians frequently concentrate almost exclusively on the personal traits of one or another historical personage (be it Franklin D. Roosevelt or John L. Lewis), who, in their view, alone personified the determinant of events. Subjectivism, widespread in modern American historiography as a whole, is fully in evidence here as well.

Many historians are reluctant to look into the important change in the mentality of the broad worker masses in the

thirties which underlay their break with the top A.F.L. leadership.

On the whole, the critics of the Wisconsinites apparently realize the fruitlessness of holding to the dogmatic view of the labor movement as an unchangeable social organism lacking any other ideals except that of looking out for the material interests of its members. But their attempts to define from their viewpoint the real stimuli of labor progress and to give a new interpretation to the changes that have taken place in the labor movement, while still denying that the movement has an independent essence making it, potentially, the class that has the decisive word in determining the destinies of the nation, cannot be regarded as fruitful.

Characteristic of this group of writers is a denial (more often conscious and only rarely unconscious) of any continuity of progressive traditions in the labor movement. To illustrate, we might turn to a book by Walter Galenson on the history of the C.I.O. in the thirties, which contains a special chapter entitled, "Some General Aspects of the Labor Movement".<sup>1</sup> Galenson takes issue with the article by Selig Perlman mentioned earlier. In his view, it would be wrong to see in the practice of the labor movement in the thirties a simple confirmation of the Wisconsinites' postulates and added testimony to the triumph of Gompersism.<sup>2</sup> The watchword of the period was change, declares Galenson. This thesis is true enough; however, Galenson combines it with an effort to belittle the importance of the long struggle of the left wing against conservatism and stagnation. He actually says that the entire more than 50-year-long history of organized labor in the U.S.A. prior to the New Deal era was a period in which the philosophy and practice of conservative "business trade unionism" predominated.

The state of affairs in the American labor movement always revealed a cleavage between conservative and progressive

<sup>1</sup> Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL. A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935-1941*, Cambridge, 1960. Galenson's work was undertaken in the context of research into the history of the labor movement in the U.S.A. between the two world wars.

<sup>2</sup> See, Walter Galenson, *Op. cit.*, p. 640.



aspirations. By virtue of certain historical causes that brought about a "particular prominence and (temporary) strength of bourgeois labor policy"<sup>1</sup> in the U.S.A. the emancipation of the American labor movement from opportunism has been associated with great difficulties. But never in these many decades has the conflict between the left and right wings ever died out.

Of great importance in the debate among bourgeois historians concerning the paths of American labor between the world wars and in determining its future destinies is the question of the relationship between economic and political struggle and the role of the trade unions in politics. The events of the thirties, when the working-class movement intensified, gave very serious cause for thought in this respect. At the time, many bourgeois historians saw a good chance of success for the advocates of a third party.<sup>2</sup> And a book by D.R. McCoy, dealing with the movement to create an anti-monopoly Farmer-Labor Party in the thirties, contains a large body of factual material unequivocally attesting to the popularity of that movement.<sup>3</sup>

Those who support the Wisconsin school, however, regard any manifestation of political independence by labor as some kind of unfortunate anomaly which should not be taken seriously. They see the failure of the many attempts to organize a labor party as a sign of American labor's "maturity". Taft, for instance, feels that the very structure of the American labor movement and the autonomy of its separate links are already quite adequate to meet the vital needs of the various strata of the working class, including their needs in the political field. Moreover, in Taft's view, there exists an ideal means for reaching set aims: pressure on the "sensitive strings" of the Democratic and Republican party machines. Taft never misses a chance to warn that any attempt to achieve desired ends

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> See, Robert R. R. Brooks, *When Labor Organizes*, New Haven, 1937, p. 302; J. Raymond Walsh, *Op. cit.*, pp. 15, 248, 253; Lois MacDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. 578; Joseph Rosenfarb, *The National Labor Policy and How It Works*, New York, 1940, p. 683.

<sup>3</sup> Donald R. McCoy, *Angry Voices. Left-of-Center Politics in the New Deal Era*, Lawrence, 1958.

under the slogan of political independence can result only in the defeat of labor programs as they run into the insuperable hostility of the bourgeois parties that share power between them.<sup>1</sup> Turning to history, he carefully selects arguments to back this conclusion.

The Wisconsinites are so eager to defend the thesis that the further the labor movement develops the more it remains the same, that they tend virtually to reject historical experience in its entirety. Other bourgeois historians, while they may take a different approach in some things, still do not venture to reject the basic dogma that says that the U.S. labor movement never encroaches upon the fundamental political prerogatives of the bourgeoisie. Historians of a bourgeois-liberal bent concede that the movement for independent labor action really existed in the United States for many decades; nonetheless, they say that never and under no circumstances did it or could it threaten the immutability of the two-party system.

But if change was the watchword of the thirties in the history of the American labor movement (as Galenson puts it), how was this reflected in the political activity of the workers? The answer offered is that it was all a matter of the degree of trade union involvement in the mechanism of the two-party system. The whole difference, in Galenson's view, was that whereas Gompers had always been only a modest petitioner in Congress, the labor leaders of the thirties—Green, Lewis and Murray—were frequent visitors in government circles.

Thus, some writers deny the very possibility of workers showing practical tendencies toward political autonomy and changing the character of the labor movement, and try to show the absolute futility of attempts in that direction, while others tell the story of the movement for independent working-class political action. Both groups, however, defending the conclusion that American labor is "realistic", predict that it will always remain in a dependent position. Hence the notion that the prevailing system of social relations is eternal.

While the Wisconsinites essentially moved not a single step away from their initial concepts, neither could the adherents of

<sup>1</sup> Philip Taft, *Organized Labor in American History*.

the so-called new approach rise above a history of economic struggle in the narrow sense of the word. Underlying the views of both groups is the doctrine of the harmony of class interests in American society, which serves, as C. Wright Mills has aptly noted, as a skillful philosophical construction which the ruling circles of the U.S.A. fall back on to help maintain their predominance.<sup>1</sup> The criticism which bourgeois scholars have made of certain aspects of the Wisconsinites' concept has in no way touched its core. Individual differences in the interpretation of one or another aspect of the history of the labor movement have not affected the underlying identity of ideological position, a position resembling unconditional endorsement of the theory combining American exceptionalism and the identity of the interests of labor and capital in the United States.

These then are some of the results of the theoretical elaboration of the key problems of the history of the American labor movement. The attempt to renovate the antiquated theory of the Wisconsin school has produced no fruitful results. It is not without reason that complaints are heard in academic circles that the postwar American historiography of the labor movement, having failed to come up with anything in the field of historical synthesis over and above that which was offered by Commons, has embarked on the road of moralizing and empiricism.<sup>2</sup>

One participant in the debate that took place in the 1950s lamented: "One of the great difficulties in trying to flame research projects is that we start with no theory, and end with

<sup>1</sup> See, C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New York, 1957, pp. 233-70.

<sup>2</sup> See, M. Derber, *Research in Labor Problems in the United States*, New York, 1967, p. 76. John Dunlop, a prominent bourgeois student of labor relations and the history and sociology of the labor movement in the United States, wrote: "While there is no disposition here to deprecate the gathering of facts of industrial relations, and many additional detailed studies are imperative, the field of industrial relations today may be described in the words of Julian Huxley: 'Mountains of facts have been piled up on the plains of human ignorance.... The result is a glut of raw material. Great piles of facts are lying around unutilized, or utilized only in an occasional and partial manner.' Facts have outrun ideas. Integrating theory has lagged far behind expanding experience" (John T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems*, New York, 1958, p. VI).

no theory, and hence find ourselves only with an accumulation of data which we do not know how to use."<sup>1</sup> This admission does not contradict the fact that the bourgeois chroniclers of the labor movement always know just how to deal with historical material when, proceeding from a negative attitude to the practical aspirations of the present-day revolutionary movement, they have to interpret the history of the labor movement and ascribe to that movement the characteristics necessary in order to draw the desired conclusion regarding its fundamental kinship with existing social institutions. This can best be illustrated by a number of examples of how certain key points in the history of the labor movement between the two world wars have been dealt with.

A completely transformed picture of the upsurge of the labor movement in the period 1918-1922 has flowed from the pen of bourgeois historians. In depicting it, the writers most often ignore the interdependence between, on the one hand, the economic conditions and the revolutionary events of world historical importance in those years, and on the other, the upsurge of the economic and political struggle of American workers. Taft and Saposs explain the postwar "radicalism" as being basically the result of "subversive" activities by a small group of Communists.<sup>2</sup> Others suggest that nothing interrupted the stagnation of the labor movement, and explain the strike movement as being the consequence of improved economic conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The strikes of 1918-1922, the greatest in the history of the United States, are sometimes represented as senseless riots of immigrant workers who were not yet acclimatized on American soil and were infected by European doctrinaire attitudes. Robert K. Murray regards the general strike in Seattle as a stupid blunder caused by a temporary loss of common sense. Picturing the Communist Party of the U.S.A. as an alien

<sup>1</sup> Quote from *American Labor in Midpassage*, ed. by B. Cochran, New York, 1959, p. 28; see also, *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Industrial Relations Research Association*, Madison, 1951, pp. 163-64.

<sup>2</sup> See, Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor in the Time of Gompers*, New York, 1957, p. 9; David J. Saposs, *Communism in the American Unions*, New York, 1959, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See, Joseph G. Rayback, *Op. cit.*, p. 275; Henry Pelling, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.



phenomenon, bourgeois historians remain silent about the causal link between the development of the class struggle within the United States itself and the fact of the Party's formation. This is particularly characteristic of such historians as Howe, Coser, Draper, Kampelman and others.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, while bourgeois historians and sociologists have shown a heightened interest in the history of the socialist movement in the USA, it must be said that their most common conclusion is that the idea of restructuring the society on the basis of collectivism has been and will always be alien to the American labor movement. This assertion threads through the works of Bell, Bowers, Shannon, Hesselstine and others.<sup>2</sup>

In explaining the reason for the decline of the labor movement in the twenties the views of the bourgeois historians in most cases coincide: the only cause was the inertia of the workers themselves. Most frequently, they make it seem as if the workers, having secured for themselves an equal share of participation in prosperity, had become imbued with a spirit of loyalty to employers and indifference to trade unions. Philip Taft, for one, holds that all the efforts of the A.F.L. to organize the mass production industries ran into indifference on the part of the workers themselves.<sup>3</sup> With reference to the alleged inertia and passive mood of the working masses and their "reconciliation" with capital, these historians endeavor to conceal the great damage caused to the labor movement by the policy of inaction pursued by Gompers, Green, Woll, Hutcheson, Frey and others, who zealously preached the principle of nonresistance and "cooperation between labor and capital". In one of his articles, historian James Morris lashes out at the critics of A.F.L. policy in the twenties, and suggests that it was

<sup>1</sup> Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party, A Critical History (1919-1957)*, New York, 1957; Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, New York, 1957; for a critique of these books see E. B. Черняк, *Буржуазная историография рабочего движения*, Moscow, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialism and American Life*, ed. by D. D. Egbert and S. Persons, Vols. I-II, Princeton, 1952; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America. A History*, New York, 1955; H. H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism. Origins of the Modern Movement*, Columbia, 1953; W. B. Hesselstine, *The Rise and Fall of Third Parties*, Washington, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> See, Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor from the Death of Gompers to the Merger*, pp. 1-2, 97.

actually designed to save trade unionism and represented one aspect of an overall "strategy of defense".<sup>1</sup> That objective factors played a role in demoralizing the labor movement at that stage is undeniable. But the demoralization was increased manifold by the capitulatory policy of the Gompersite A.F.L. leadership, its susceptibility to intimidation, bribery and compromise, and its servility before the united power of capital.

The bourgeois historians extend the state of apathy also to the years of the world economic crisis of 1929-1933. The way they depict it, the broad popular movements that swept the country in those years were isolated bursts of "blind rage". This is how Barbash, Dulles, Seidman, Shannon and others assess the course of history.<sup>2</sup>

As noted earlier, the view generally accepted among bourgeois historians is that Franklin D. Roosevelt's liberal legislation ushered in a new era in the history of the American labor movement. Thus, what in fact was really a concession wrested from the ruling class by the workers in a fierce struggle against capital, is portrayed as a kind of Magna Carta magnanimously granted to labor by the legislators and pulling the labor movement out of an impasse. Most bourgeois historians, including Taft, Leiter, Hardman, Barbash, and many others, hold to this version.<sup>3</sup> However, their assertions about the "particularly favourable conditions" created by the Roosevelt administration as virtually the decisive factor in labor's progress in the 1930s do not stand up to serious criticism. The facts show that it would be wrong to exaggerate the practical effect of the New Deal labor legislation.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> See, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4, July 1958, p. 572.

<sup>2</sup> See, Jack Barbash, *Labor Unions in Action*, New York, 1948, p. 7; Foster Rhea Dulles, *Op. cit.*, p. 261; Joel Seidman, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*, p. 5; David A. Shannon, *Op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> See, Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor from the Death of Gompers to the Merger*, p. 45; J.B.S. Hardman, *John L. Lewis, Labor Leader and Personality: An Interpretation in Labor History*, Winter 1961, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 15; *Labor and the New Deal*, p. 8; Jack Barbash, *Op. cit.*, pp. IX, 7; Robert D. Leiter, *Labor Problems and Trade Unionism*, New York, 1952, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> Noting the weakness of the arguments in favor of the traditional view, Frank Tannenbaum wrote: "Those who blame the New Deal and the Wagner

passage of the N.I.R.A. certainly did not bring in its train an automatic increase in union membership,<sup>1</sup> as bourgeois historians imply. The workers had to assert their right to organize through strikes and struggle in the streets.

The Communist Party of the U.S.A. played a big role in maintaining the militant traditions of the labor movement, in the spread and revival of these traditions, and in the struggle for social progress. It is a known fact that the Communists did more than anyone else for the creation of an organized movement of the unemployed. It is no secret that many campaigns to organize workers into unions owed much of their success to local labor organizers, and it was precisely among them that there were many Communists, who as far back as the Depression years, had done important, though perhaps outwardly inconspicuous, work to revive the labor movement. But bourgeois historians tend to ignore the objective facts and often make statements to the effect that Communists had taken no part at all in the building of the C.I.O. and long remained hostile to it.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that when it comes to appraising the first two decades in the history of the Communist Party red baiters often step in, posing as "experts on the history of Communism". In a review of a book on the history of the Communist Party of the United States by Irwing Howe and Lewis Coser, William Z. Foster wrote: "The book makes a show of scholarship, but in reality it is an unscrupulous defense of the capitalist system. Under a veneer of politeness, it makes use of all the professional tricks of the red baiter.

"It is so heavily interlarded with all sorts of distortions, slanders, representations, confusions, superficialities, and

Act for the increasing power of American trade-unionism give too much weight to the influence of politics on the growth of American labor organization. The New Deal merely hastened the process. It neither initiated it nor could have prevented it" (Frank Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labor*, New York, 1951, p. 75).

<sup>1</sup> See, *Labor and the Government. An Investigation of the Role of the Government in Labor Relations*, ed. by A. L. Bernheim and D. Van Doren, New York, 1935, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See, David J. Saposs, *Communism in the American Unions*, pp. 15, 125, 136-37.

direct lies against the Communist Party, that it is of very little value as a history."<sup>1</sup> These words could also be applied to works by Shannon, Draper, Kampelman, Saposs and many others.

On the whole, bourgeois historians have failed to give adequate explanation of the complicated and contradictory road traversed by the American labor movement. Writers sharing the Wisconsinites' views attach primary importance to defending the ideological principles of "business trade unionism" and are still absorbed in the quest for proofs that the American labor movement was "conservative" and loyal to Gompersite traditions.

The history of the labor movement is a field of intense ideological struggle between bourgeois and Marxist historians.

In the United States, where a great many books and articles on the labor movement have been published, progressive historians wage a constant struggle against conservative historical and sociological theories. This struggle is particularly intense when it comes to dealing with the history of the American people and the proletarian class struggle. Progressive American historians tell the full story of the militant traditions of the working class and its struggle to improve economic conditions and secure social rights. Foremost among these are Marxist historians such as William Z. Foster, Charles Ruthenberg, John Reed, Anthony Bimba, Herbert Aptheker and Philip Foner.

Particularly valuable is Foster's research into the history of the labor, trade-union and Communist movements in the United States and other countries of the western hemisphere, and on the emancipation movement of the Black people in the United States. Foster made an important contribution to the study of the history of the international revolutionary movement as well.

He published his first works in the twenties, both as a historian and active participant in the events he wrote about. First mention should go to his book about the Great Steel

<sup>1</sup> *The Worker*, December 14, 1958, p. 11.



Strike of 1919, which he himself led.<sup>1</sup> In those years, he also wrote *The Trade Union Educational League in America, Misleaders of Labor*, and other works in which he made use of official statistics, union documents and periodicals.<sup>2</sup> Drawing extensively on official statistics, documents of trade unions and press reports he analyzed the strike struggle during the upsurge of the labor movement, showed the tendencies in the American labor movement, and bared the roots of the Gompersites' reformist policies. Some of his later works provide an important summary of the history of the American people.<sup>3</sup>

His *Outline Political History of the Americas* is a history of the American continent from its discovery by Europeans to the fifties. It was the first attempt to treat the history of all the American countries as a single whole. The history of the Americas is the history of working people, class struggle, national liberation movements, wars and revolutions. Foster describes the formation of the industrial proletariat in the various American countries. He shows the social, economic and political conditions under which this process took place in the United States and gives a scientific Marxist explanation of the ideological lag of the American proletariat. Foster traces the emergence and development of the American labor movement from the first working-class organizations to the labor movement of the 1950s. He stresses that the proletariat of the United States had militant and progressive traditions and that the emergence of socialist organizations and the founding of the Communist Party of the United States were organically linked with the social, economic and political development of the country and came as the natural result of the upsurge of the labor movement in it. He wrote: "Communist parties developed in nearly all the American countries, primarily on

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, New York, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *Strike Strategy*, Chicago, 1926; *idem.*, *Misleaders of Labor*, Chicago, 1927; *idem.*, *Pages from a Worker's Life*, New York, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism, Principles, Organization, Strategy and Tactics*, New York, 1947; *The Twilight of World Capitalism*, New York, 1949; *Outline Political History of the Americas*, New York, 1951; *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, New York, 1952; *The Negro People in American History*, New York, 1954, and others.

the basis of their domestic situations.... The Communist parties of the western hemisphere, like those of the Old World, were not created, as such, by the Russian Revolution. Rather, they grew out of actual conditions in their respective nations and were matured by the experiences of the great Russian Revolution in establishing socialism."<sup>1</sup>

Foster devoted a separate work to the history of the Communist Party of the United States, in which he treated the development of the Party as indissolubly linked with the American labor movement in general. He provided convincing facts showing the vanguard role of the Communists in the movement of the American proletariat, their enormous organizational and educational work, and the outstanding contribution they made in the struggle against conservative craft unionism, against the bureaucratic forms of leadership, and for the building of mass industrial unions. The Communists played a leading role in the largest actions of the American working class during the upsurge of the labor movement in the period 1919-1922 and during the world economic crisis of 1929-1933, when mass demonstrations of unemployed took place.

As Foster clearly demonstrates, the Communists helped the working class to get its bearings and correctly appraise the situation at home and abroad, strengthened its sense of class solidarity, and were most active in the anti-fascist and anti-monopoly movements of the American working people.

Foster's works clearly set forth internationalist views on the history of the peoples of the American continent, including the Black people and the indigenous population of the continent, the Indians. He showed the extent to which the Indians and Black people were deprived of their rights. In a book entitled *The Negro People in American History*, he asserted the principles of proletarian internationalism and class solidarity, and attacked racist ideas. He wrote: "But the worst of all the crimes of expanding capitalism in this country has been the centuries-long outrage it has perpetrated, and continues to perpetrate, against the Negro people.... The most shameful pages of

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *Outline Political History of the Americas*, p. 376.

American history are those dealing with the exploitation and oppression of the Negro masses."<sup>1</sup>

The book is a detailed history of Black Americans, reflecting their struggle for equality and the role they played in the democratic movement of the American people and in the proletarian movement. While appraising the Negro question as a problem of national self-determination and analyzing the specific features of this problem in the United States, Foster at the same time proves that the Black people's struggle for equality has been part of the general struggle of the American proletariat for social progress. The book provides evidence of the consistent fight of the Communist Party of the United States all through its history for the rights of the Black people and for unity between Black and white workers.

The class struggle in the United States is also dealt with in books by Eugene Dennis<sup>2</sup> and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn,<sup>3</sup> most prominent leaders in the labor movement, as well as by Herbert Aptheker, Israel Amter and Robert Minor.

Anna Rochester's works deal with major aspects of the development of American capitalism, the history of the biggest monopolies, and the economic aspects of imperialism.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1920s, she collaborated with Grace Hutchins, Robert Dunn and other progressive authors in putting out a series of books on the situation and struggle of the workers in the coal, textile and other major industries.<sup>5</sup> The series was published by the Labor Research Association.

Anthony Bimba's *The History of the American Working Class*<sup>6</sup> gives a Marxist interpretation of the class struggle in the

<sup>1</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Dennis, *Ideas They Cannot Jail*, New York, 1950; *idem.*, *In Defense of Your Freedom*, New York, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece. Autobiography of "The Rebel Girl"*, New York, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Rochester, *Labor and Coal*, New York, 1931; *idem.*, *Rulers of America*, New York, 1936; *idem.*, *Why Farmers are Poor*, New York, 1940; *idem.*, *Profits and Wages*, New York, 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Grace Hutchins, *Labor and Silk*, New York, 1929; Robert W. Dunn and Jack Hardy, *Labor and Textile. A Study of Cotton and Wool Manufacturing*, New York, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Bimba, *The History of the American Working Class*, New York, 1927.

United States from the colonial period to the twenties. Although the author restricted himself to relating the history of the labor movement without analyzing social and economic development, his book gives the first Marxist assessment of the working-class struggles and reveals the true role of union bureaucrats and their anti-labor policies during the twenties.

An outstanding contribution to the study of the development of the American labor movement has been made by the prominent historian Philip S. Foner. His four-volume *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*<sup>1</sup> deals with the struggle of the American proletariat in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Foner has enriched the historical literature with new documentary sources, such as materials from the archives of labor organizations, never before used by historians. Both in this work and his book on the Fur and Leather Workers Union,<sup>2</sup> he traces the struggle between the progressive and conservative tendencies in the American labor movement, gives a Marxist interpretation of the features of the movement which had caused its theoretical backwardness, shows why the working class had to fight to improve its condition, and describes the intense class battles that took place in the United States.

Foner treats the history of the Fur and Leather Workers Union as part of the general history of the U.S. labor movement. He proves that the struggle for creating mass industrial unions in the United States, the struggle which resulted in the emergence of the C.I.O., was natural and inevitable. He also writes about the fur and leather workers' fight for democratic forms of the labor movement and emphasizes the nation-wide importance of this struggle.

An important role in propagating Marxist views on the development of the American society and on the development of the proletarian class struggle between the two world wars was played by the theoretical journal *Communist* and the *Daily*

<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 1, New York, 1949; Vol. 2, New York, 1955; Vol. 3, New York, 1964; Vol. 4, New York, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union*, Newark, 1950.



*Worker* newspaper, published by the Communist Party of the United States. Marxist historians had to wage a struggle not only against bourgeois scholars but also against other writers who promoted the idea of "exceptionalism" in the American labor movement's development, and the pragmatists from the ranks of union bureaucrats who sought, and are still seeking, to justify political neutrality and class collaboration.

In 1936, progressive historian Mike Quin wrote a book about the general strike in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> Written while the heroic events were still fresh (although published only thirteen years later), the book is permeated with the true spirit of proletarian struggle. It shows how the strike made clear the imperative necessity of workers' unity, and how the events revealed the anti-labor policies not only of the government but of the union bureaucrats as well. It also shows the active role played by Communists in the strike of 1934, and emphasizes that the strike promoted the growth of the labor movement in general and helped give birth to the militant longshoremens' union in particular.

Boyer and Morais's *Labor's Untold Story*,<sup>2</sup> a book full of factual material about the American labor movement from the Civil War to the 1950s, is important not only in that it gives a detailed description of the class struggle in the United States, but also because it describes the methods used by American monopolies in their struggle against the workers and exposes the treacherous role played by the A.F.L. leadership. Boyer and Morais give a positive appraisal of the formation of the C.I.O. and its role in the labor movement of the thirties.

A book by S. Yellen describes the class struggle in the United States from the late 19th century to 1934.<sup>3</sup> The work's chief merit is that it shows, on the basis of extensive factual material, how the class struggle in the United States intensified in the imperialist period, with primary attention given to major strikes. It also reveals the methods used by the imperialist bourgeoisie in its struggle against the working class.

<sup>1</sup> Mike Quin, *The Big Strike*, Olema, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> R. Boyer and H. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, New York, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> S. Yellen, *American Labor Struggles*, New York, 1936.

Soviet historians have written a number of major works on the political history of the United States in which considerable attention is given to the labor movement. These include, above all, the two-volume. *Ocherki novoi i noveishei istorii SShA* (Essays on the Modern History of the United States), prepared by the Academy of Sciences, and works by L.I. Zubok, V.I. Lan, N.N. Yakovlev and Y.V. Ananova.<sup>1</sup> A work by A. I. Katz, published in 1962, makes a study of the economic condition of the American proletariat over the past several decades, that is, in the imperialist period.<sup>2</sup>

A number of works by Soviet historians deal with specific major aspects of the American labor movement between the two world wars. Thus, two studies published in 1961<sup>3</sup> discuss in detail the upsurge of the American labor movement after World War I, the struggle of American workers against the anti-Soviet intervention, and the social and economic conditions for the emergence of the Communist Party of the United States. This period of large-scale class battles has also been dealt with in articles by other historians.

V. L. Malkov's work on the development of the American labor movement during the economic crisis of 1929-1933,<sup>4</sup> examines the causes and nature of the mass struggle of the American working class, and devotes special attention to the rise of the unemployed movement in those years.

A study of a number of questions relating to the history of the American proletariat is made in works by B. Y. Mikhailov, who focusses on the trade union movement and traces the

<sup>1</sup> *Oчерки новой и новейшей истории США*, Vols. I, II, Moscow, 1960; В. И. Лан, *Классы и партии в САСШ*, Moscow, 1932; 2nd edition, Moscow 1937; *idem.*, *США от первой до второй мировой войны*, Moscow, 1947; А. И. Зубок, *Очерки истории рабочего движения в США, 1865-1918*, Moscow, 1962; Н. Н. Яковлев, *Новейшая история США. 1917-1960*, Moscow, 1961; Е. В. Ананова, *Новейшая история США. 1919-1939 гг.*, Moscow, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> А. И. Кац, *Положение пролетариата США при империализме*, Moscow, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> С. А. Ованесьян, *Подъем рабочего движения в США в 1919-1921 гг.*, Moscow, 1961; И. М. Краснов, *Классовая борьба в США и движение против антисоветской интервенции (1919-1920)*, Moscow, 1961.

<sup>4</sup> В. А. Мальков, *Рабочее движение в США в период мирового экономического кризиса*, Moscow, 1961.

twenty-year struggle of American workers in forming and building the C.I.O.<sup>1</sup>

The brief review of progressive historical literature presented here shows that there is a serious struggle in the historical literature revolving around the interpretation of developments in the labor movement in the U.S.A. Progressive historians have written a considerable number of books and articles giving a scientific analysis of the class struggle and showing the untenability of bourgeois historical theories. One of their main tasks now is to make a more comprehensive and deeper study of the social struggle in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> Б. Я. Михайлов, *Конгресс производственных профсоюзов США (1935-1955)*, Moscow, 1959; *idem.*, *Агентура Уолл-стрит в конгрессе производственных профсоюзов США*, Moscow, 1951.

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